

COMBATING YOUTH OBESITY WITHIN
AN AFRICAN AMERICAN
CHURCH

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ABSTRACT
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By

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United Theological Seminary, 2011

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This project was conducted at Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and was designed to address youth obesity in an African American community. Youths were given pre-test and post-test questionnaires to collect and analyze data relating to attitudes concerning health and obesity. The project consisted of workshops to promote healthy lifestyles. The treatment was applied for eight weeks and included eight Bible study sessions. It was the hypothesis of the researcher that nutritional education could change attitudes about youth obesity. A post-test questionnaire was used to measure attitudinal change. The results of the model confirmed the hypothesis.

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DEDICATION

In loving and thankful affection and appreciation to my sister, Barbara, and cousin, Linda, for their enduring financial support and enlisted prayers throughout this journey. I would like to thank my son, Roberto, who I pray will meet the challenges of reducing his weight so that he may live a long and productive life and make many contributions to this great society. Many thanks for my daughter, Maya, who I hope recognized my pursuits in education. May they encourage her to complete her education and move forward in life to become all that she can be.

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INTRODUCTION

Transformative learning occurs when an individual has reflected on assumptions or expectations, has found those assumptions to be faulty, and has revised them.¹ When reflection focuses on premises (that is, why an issue is important in the first place), it has the potential to transform how one sees the world. This is the process of emancipatory learning—becoming free from forces that have limited our options, forces that have been taken for granted, or seen as beyond our control.²

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once advised all people that their collective futures depended on how effectively they would be engage in the many opportunities that would enter each of their lives. At some point we must stop making excuses, passing the buck, and blaming others for what we ourselves can control.

“Doors are opening to you—doors of opportunities that were not open to your mothers and your fathers—and the great challenge facing you is to be ready to face these doors as they open. If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Leontyne Price sing before the Metropolitan Opera. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.’ If you can’t be a pine at the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley. Be the best little shrub on the side of the hill. Be a bush if you can’t be a tree. If you can’t be a highway, just be a trail. If you can’t be a sun, be a star.

¹ Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: A New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 2.

² Ibid.

For it isn't by size that you win or fail. Be the best of whatever you are."³

In his book, *Martin Luther King Jr. on Creative Living*, author Michael G. Long said, "Creative living, in King's thought, entailed giving our allegiance to the one and eternal God, the God who is present to us not only in nature but especially through history. The eternal God of love, justice, order, and power has chosen to enter the history of our life, right here and right now, to give us the strength and direction we need for traveling on the road to the Promised Land—a beloved community that reflects the love and justice found within the character of God."⁴

This researcher is convinced that in order to inspire a positive attitudinal change within the church congregations concerning adult and youth health, the change must first take place within the leadership of the church. This must be done by way of better information and more effective education for all church leaders, parents, and youth. The author understands that many churches and congregations sacrificially accept the monumental responsibilities of meeting spiritual, financial, and emotional needs of their members. The church, as the foundation of the African American community, is the most logical launch pad for an effective, offensive campaign against obesity. This researcher proposes that in order to win this battle, church leadership and their congregations must sacrificially accept the tenets set forth in the Bible as they relate to the body being the temple of God. Church leadership must educate members of the church and community until the battle against youth obesity is won.

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia on October 26, 1967. www.seattletimes.com/special/mlk/king/word/blueprint.html

⁴ Michael G. Long, *Martin Luther King Jr. on Creative Living* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 33.

Obesity comes in all shapes, sizes, and forms and affects all ethnic backgrounds and is prevalent in churches congregations. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity has tripled in the last thirty years.⁵ Youth obesity is a complex issue that involves a myriad of social and economic issues that will impact churches and congregations. Caloric consumption is not the entire problem facing youth today. Exercise was once an integral part of a child's daily activities; today, exercise is the exception for too many children. Experts warn that youth today spend fifty-plus hours each week watching television, videos, and sitting in front of computers. This trend not only jeopardizes the health of individuals and families; it also has become a threat to national security. Many would-be recruits are being turned away from the United States military because of conditions linked to overweight and obesity.

The purpose of this project is to offer suggestions for combating obesity among youth to create a stronger congregation to participate in the works of God in good health. As a result of this study, the Christian Education Department at Lewis Chapel may consider implementing parts of this study—instructional classes for youth in health education, development of exercise programs, and the development of classes that emphasize healthier eating.

The first chapter of this project, which is the ministry focus, defines the area of ministry that this project is addressing. It explains the areas of ministry chosen. It also provides topical discussion and special insights as well as the context of this project. Childhood obesity is associated with various health-related consequences. Obese children

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Tips for Parents—Ideas to Help Children Maintain a Healthy Weight," www.cdc.gov/healthweight/children/index.html, (Last Accessed July 1, 2011).

and adolescents may experience immediate health consequences and may be at risk for weight-related health problems in adulthood.

In Chapter Two, the state of the art in this ministry model will be discussed. The author will provide a narrative analysis of books, articles, journals, and literature related to the project. These include relevant concepts and other models of ministry. The author will use many of these references to help formulate the field experiment, sermons, Bible study, and research questions to formulate a better understanding about the overall attitudes of youth toward obesity in the African American church and community.

Chapter Three provides the theoretical foundation that supports a person's commitment to care for his or her body and health. The author attempts to gather a historical perspective of biblical teachings and practices that related to the care of one's bodies as the temple of the Lord. The author used an investigative approach to determine whether the Bible or other historical literature addressed eating and healthy lifestyles, as well as the problem of obesity, in past generations.

Chapter Four formulates the research methodology for this project. The hypothesis of the project focuses on the questionnaire, pre-test, post-test, and the use of the model employed for this context. The method used helped to clarify adult and youth attitudinal change toward better health and healthier lifestyles.

In Chapter Five, the field experience of the project is discussed. Data analysis of the results of the model, along with recommendations from the class discussion, handouts, activities, and dietary suggestions, will be presented in this segment.

The final chapter of the document, Chapter Six, is the author's reflection upon the field experience, summation, and conclusions. Health problems are not the only

consequences of the rise in obesity among children and youth. Psychosocial consequences also have a long-term and detrimental impact. It is the author's intent to propose an intervention within the African American church and community to aid in the fight against childhood obesity. The intervention consists of dietary education, exercise programs, and food preparation.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

This project is intended to help foster better understanding and commitment among church leadership and congregations of the need to take a more active role in protecting the health of their members, including youth, by teaching them to practice healthier lifestyles. The project is meant to inject attitudinal change within youth impacted by obesity at Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Youth obesity has become an epidemic with long-term implications for the future of the United States. As healthcare costs continue to skyrocket, much of those expenditures will involve obesity issues surrounding the youth.

“Childhood obesity is a major public health concern. If we don’t curb this widespread problem, our country will see a substantial increase in cardiovascular disease and other health issues in the years ahead,” Dr. Susan B. Shurin, acting director of the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), stated in an agency news release.¹ Dr. Shurin added that childhood is the optimal time to encourage healthy habits that children can practice for the rest of their lives. The U. S. National Institutes of Health stated that it would invest \$72.5 million to curb the growing problem of childhood

¹ Internet, Bloomberg Businessweek, “Two New Programs Aim to Prevent, Treat Childhood Obesity,” Sept. 13, 2010, www.businessweek.com/lifestyle/content/healthday/643027.html, (Accessed, July 1, 2011).

obesity². Part of that expenditure—the \$49.5 million—will be used to develop and test anti-obesity strategies that target home, community, and primary-care settings for preschool children who live in poor, ethnically diverse neighborhoods.³ The agency also will examine the effectiveness of home- and school-based obesity treatments on overweight children ages seven to fourteen. A second program will evaluate existing community-based efforts to reduce childhood obesity in 300 communities across the nation, at a cost of \$23 million.⁴

“Over the past several years, community programs across the United States have been implementing programs and policies to encourage healthier eating, increase opportunities for physical activity, and devise other steps to reverse the increasing rates of childhood obesity,” Denise Simons-Morton, director of the NHLBI’s Division for the Application of Research Discoveries was quoted as saying in 2010 Bloomberg Businessweek article.⁵ “This study will evaluate community programs to determine which of them or their components are most promising for controlling weight and improving children’s obesity-related health behaviors and weight,” Dr. Shurin was quoted as saying in the same article.⁶

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Scott Perry, a Wilmington, North Carolina, personal trainer, said childhood obesity is an epidemic in the United States.⁷ “The percentage of obese children in the United States has more than tripled over the past 30 year,” he wrote. “A recent study has shown that close to 20 percent of children between the ages of five to seventeen are obese, while 70 percent of obese youths have at least one risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the leading killer in adults, and it is now becoming a problem in children and adolescents. When a child eats poorly and does not exercise, these habits carry into adulthood and can lead to numerous health problems. These problems include diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Childhood obesity is not only a physical health concern; it also can affect children on a social level. Obesity in children can lead to poor self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders.”⁸

What role will the black church play in teaching and developing programs that will help teach its youth to take better care of themselves?

Determining Whether a Child is Obese

When a child or adolescent is taken to a physician for a checkup, a common procedure is to measure the child’s body mass index (BMI). BMI is not always the most accurate measure, but it can work well with the general population. A more accurate way to check for obesity would be to measure a child’s body fat percentage.⁹ This test can be administered by a qualified fitness professional if the right equipment is present.

⁷ Scott Perry, Tri-County Health Medical, “Childhood Obesity—Are You Leading by Example?” September 26, 2010, 18.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid.

Assessing body fat percentage will allow parents or guardians to determine how much of a child's body is made up of fat and how much is made up of lean body mass (muscle, organs, and bones). A BMI reading may not always be accurate, however, because no two children have the same genetic makeup. Children with larger or more muscular structures register higher on the BMI chart and could easily be mistaken as obese.¹⁰

Obesity results when body fat accumulates over time as a result of a chronic energy imbalance (calories consumed exceed calories expended). Obesity is a major health hazard worldwide and is associated with several common diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and some forms of cancer.¹¹ Another factor that impacts obesity is genetics. In recent decades, obesity has reached epidemic levels among populations whose environments offer an abundance of calorie-rich foods and few opportunities for physical activity.¹²

Family History Plays a Role

Although changes in the genetic makeup of populations occur too slowly to be responsible for this rapid rise in obesity, genes do play a role in the development of obesity. Most likely, genes regulate how an individual's bodies capture, store, and release energy derived from food.¹³ The origin of these genes, however, might not be recent.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Internet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Genomics and Health," <http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/resources/diseases/obesity/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2011).

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Any explanation of the obesity epidemic, therefore, must include both the role of genetics as well as environment. A commonly quoted genetic explanation for the rapid rise in obesity is the mismatch between today's environment and "energy-thrifty genes" that multiplied in the past under different environmental conditions when food sources were rather unpredictable.¹⁵ According to the "thrifty genotype" hypothesis, the same genes that helped early generations survive occasional famines are now being challenged by environments in which food is plentiful year round.¹⁶

Children in families where obesity is prevalent may be more likely to gain excess weight, especially in environments where high-calorie foods are readily available and physical activity is not encouraged. Parents must get involved and set a healthy example.¹⁷ Health experts warn that physical exercise has become nonexistent in many public schools. The effect is magnified when healthy food products—especially fresh fruits and vegetables—are not available and families live in communities plagued with poor economic condition, an absence of major grocery store chains, and the lack of quality jobs that include health benefits.

Indeed, too often in poor communities, low-income families find it more affordable to consume high-calorie, high-fat meals—especially fast food meals—than to buy fresh fruits and vegetables or meats with lower fat content. After coming under intense criticism from health advocates, many of the larger fast food chains have begun

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

offering a wider variety of salads or grilled meats. Some also have reduced or eliminated their so-called “super size” portions.

Access to healthier foods poses another problem for many low-income families. Because of the often-stated economics of the grocery industry—high volume but low profit margins—grocery executives have insisted that they can ill afford to build stores in low-income communities where overhead costs are higher due to issues including theft and the need for increased store security. Those executives have proffered such arguments as an excuse to leave millions of Americans living in neighborhoods without a single grocery store. Without grocery stores, many of those families are forced to shop at corner grocers that rarely carry fresh meats or produce but instead stock large supplies of nonperishable canned goods that are high in salts, fats, and chemical additives. These so-called *food deserts* will be discussed later in this researcher’s project.

Parents Must Set Positive Examples

If being physically fit is not a priority for parents, it probably will be unimportant to their child. What a child eats begins at home, and such habits are learned early in life. The choices a parent offers a child or teenager at home will affect that child's eating habits greatly. Introducing a variety of healthy food options, avoiding junk at home and food that are low in nutritional value will greatly increase a child's chances of eating healthy.¹⁸ It is vital that children eat proper foods and exercise daily. Therefore, parents must get their children involved in extracurricular, physical activities—sports, workouts, and fitness clubs—and find physical activities in which they, too, can participate. (This also can be beneficial to parents).¹⁹

Some have argued that the *thrifty genotype* is part of a wider spectrum of ways in which genes can favor fat accumulation in a given environment.²⁰ These ways include the drive to overeat (poor regulation of appetite and satiety), the tendency to be sedentary (physically inactive), a diminished ability to use dietary fats as fuel, and an enlarged, easily stimulated capacity to store body fat.²¹

¹⁸ Perry, Tri-County Health Medical, 18.

¹⁹ Ibid. 18.

²⁰ Internet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Genomics and Health," <http://www.cdc.gov/genomics/resources/diseases/obesity/> (Accessed Nov. 4, 2011).

²¹ Ibid.

Not all people living in industrialized nations where food is abundant and exercise is scarce will become obese. Nor will all obese people have the same body fat distribution or suffer the same health issues. This diversity occurs among groups of the same racial or ethnic background and even within families living in the same environment. The variation in how people respond to similar environmental conditions is an additional indication that genes play a role in the development of obesity. This is consistent with the theory that obesity results from genetic variation interacting with shifting environmental conditions.²²

Kids Need Workouts, Too

Parents should take their children with them to workouts. Teens can benefit from lifting light weights for high repetitions to help build muscle endurance, burn calories, improve cardiovascular health, and develop a work ethic that will last a lifetime.²³ Another part of balancing calories is to engage in an appropriate amount of physical activity and avoid too much sedentary time. In addition to being fun for children and teens, regular physical activity has many health benefits—strengthening bones, decreasing blood pressure, reducing stress and anxiety, building self-esteem, and weight management.

Children and teens should participate in at least sixty minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. Children imitate

²² Ibid.

²³ Perry, Tri-County Health Medical, 18.

adults, so parents and guardians should add physical activity to their daily routines and encourage their child to join them.²⁴

Some examples of moderate-intensity physical activity include brisk walking, playing tag, jumping rope, playing soccer, swimming, and dancing.²⁵ In addition to encouraging physical activity, parents also should help children avoid too much sedentary time. Although quiet time for reading and homework is fine, parents must limit the time their children spend watching television, playing video games, or surfing the Web to no more than two hours per day.²⁶

This researcher is convinced that if an attitudinal change in church congregations is to occur relating to adult and youth health, it will have to first take place first within church leadership. This must be done by way of better and more effective education for church leaders, parents, and youth. This researcher understands the normative journey that many churches and congregations places on themselves and the position of meeting members spiritually, financially, and emotionally.

When the McDonald's restaurant chain opened in the 1950s, a soda weighed seven ounces. Today, 7-Eleven's forty-four-ounce Super Big Gulp has its own fan club on face book. With the proliferation of cooking shows on daytime and evening television, one is left with the daunting task of deciding what to eat next and how much.

²⁴ Internet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Healthy Weight—It's Not a Diet, It's a Lifestyle," www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/children, (Accessed Nov. 4, 2011).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Dr. David Satcher, former U. S. Surgeon General, informs us that far too many American children grow up today in environments where sedentary lifestyles and an excess of nutrient-poor, calorie-dense foods have become normalized. If current trends continue, today's children may have shorter life expectancies than their parents. Dr. Satcher went on to say that this is a problem that is serious as it is solvable, if we work together.²⁷

First Lady Michelle Obama has become a leading advocate against obesity among youth in American. In a recent issue of Newsweek, she made a convincing appeal on "How we can empower parents, schools, and the community to battle childhood obesity." Her national fitness campaign—"Let's Move"—is about getting more nutritious food into the nation's schools and giving parents the tools they need to keep their families healthy and fit. Churches are an extension to the community and use the impetus and energy of the "Let's Move" program to empower the members of the congregation to become healthier and fit.

The epidemic of childhood obesity in America has been evident for years. Statistics show that one-third of all children in the United States are overweight or obese. This has affected how children feel and how they feel about themselves. The risks to their health and to the United States economy are evident—billions of dollars are spent each year treating obesity-related conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

The understanding of past behavioral programs has been the principle treatments for obesity, but such programs have been under attack because of high rates of relapse and questions regarding the health effects of both dieting and mild to moderate obesity.

²⁷ Ibid.

However, issues have led to a number of modifications to the basic behavioral programs. These programs now incorporate exercise, are generally longer, and provide extended follow-up support of some kind.

This researcher recalls growing up in North Carolina and attending West Pender Elementary School, an all-black school, in the early and mid 1960s. The author's early teachers were: Mrs. Carrie Newkirk, Mrs. Annie Winn, Mr. Cooper, and Mr. Claybrook. These were strong, proud, solid people who cared about students and what they learned. They made certain that students applied themselves and put forth their best effort. High school would move the author into a different arena. Although the author never placed great emphasis on schoolwork, the author had to maintain acceptable grades in order to play sports. During the author's high school years, Mr. William Jordan, Ms. Delouse Henry, and basketball coach Mr. Joe Clay Jones were teachers who showed concerns for their students and were involved in their lives.

Playing basketball was the sustaining power that kept the author focused, along with the assistance of Mr. Jordan and Coach Jones. The rules that shaped the author's basketball team—self-worth, integrity, morals, teamwork, trust, and communication—were also key in helping the author develop throughout high school. It was at this time that the author took on a new form of transformative learning, of making decisions that would “consciously change the author's behavior, values, and knowledge”.²⁸

The author earned a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration (BBA) from Campbell University and was looking forward to working his way up the corporate ladder and into management. The author started his career by moving to Atlanta, Georgia,

²⁸ Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning*, xx.

and later to Huntsville, Alabama, for five years. While in Huntsville, the author attended service at First Baptist Church under the powerful preaching, teaching, and leadership of Dr. Julius Suggs. The author continued to be drawn toward a more intellectual understanding of religion. Who was God? What did God have to offer?

The author could not understand why people of faith could not be rich, successful, and intellectual and still serve God. The author's cultural experience was that Christians had to focus on life after death and not concern themselves with building earthly wealth because that was considered "sin," or placing another God before the creator God. Why would a God who created the world and everything in it be jealous? Why would God have countless blessing available to God's children and not allow them to enjoy the availability of these resources? What is the quality of life? How does one develop knowledge? How does one develop skills? How does one set goals that will help individual's succeed? The author needed "the substance of things hoped for".²⁹ What did God have to offer to ensure that one would become his best?

In 1998 the author moved to northeast Virginia, and a few months later the author became a student at Virginia Union University School of Theology in Richmond. The author's first professor, Dr. Harry Simmons, impressed upon the author's mind and heart that if one was thinking of becoming a minister, one needed to make sure that one was real to those he or she encountered; people can detect an imposter. Spiritually, the author began taking on a different attitude and desire to be genuine for those whom God would entrust to him.

²⁹ Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African American Faith*, (New York: Judson Press, 1995), xx.

While at Virginia Union, the author's theology was being challenged. The author's religiosity was becoming "the substance of things hoped for."³⁰ The reading, the classes, and engaging with other seminary students and professors were deeply appreciated. For the first time in the author's Christian experience, one could go to God without being condemned and asked God questions that only in the Spirit of God one could obtain understanding and knowledge.

In 2002, while living in Virginia, the author completed his M.B.A. The next year the family moved back to Fayetteville, North Carolina. In 2004, the author was presented with a divorce, and the company the author worked for went out of business. For the next few years the author would struggle with finding gainful employment. His 401(k) retirement account continued to dissipate, and the author's health became a concern. Was this the best that God could offer? Had the author given up the best that business could provide just to follow Jesus?

The author recognizes that God's grace does sustain all of our going and coming. (II Corinthians 12:9): "My grace is sufficient for you." Through the author's experience in seminary and now studying to preach God's Word, this has been the motivation to sustain the author's confidence that God is meeting all needs through this journey. Looking back, the author has come to understand more and more that the author's theology is redeveloping a spiritual presupposition for understanding how God is preparing the author going forward.

The great challenge is to be able to offer congregations a more comprehensive approach to the Christian understanding and allow those members who accept a slightly

³⁰ Ibid.

different challenge to “think outside of the box.” This would be a project for churches and their congregations to develop a way for empowerment in helping to make better spiritual decisions for future growth. This model within church ministry would help stimulate members and church leadership to develop their understanding of scriptures and how God Words can instill growth in each person’s spiritual development and Christian understanding.

We can increase one’s understanding when it comes to learning the Bible. We can study the history of the text, the history surrounding text, and the history within the text, as we examine and increase our biblical knowledge of texts. The author believes the religiosity practiced in today’s society should be one of deeper concerns for each member and churches to understanding how to care for the body, the temple of God.

During the author’s seminary experience, he developed a deeper appreciation for investigating social events that help to give understanding to the texts in today’s modern terms. Christian education is as important as studying at seminary or universities to help foster individual spiritual growth. While at Virginia Union, the author learned the importance of commitment to studying biblical texts through meditation, spending time with the texts so that the texts come alive. This was the lecture and teaching of Dr. Miles Jones, a professor at Virginia Union. The author learned to reconstruct his theology while there. Much of the teaching and learning that had occurred at the author’s home church and community had missed many points. The author’s presuppositions were based mostly on feeling and emotion and not grounded on biblical principles and understanding.

In October 2009, a young lady from high school stopped the author and asked for prayer. She said she was suffering from breast cancer. The author found himself

wondering whether churches in his community offered programs and support groups to build strength and endurance for those suffering similar ordeals. Such groups could go beyond the walls of the church and impact the community in ways that would eclipse our greater understanding of God's intended words, works, and will. The church can develop in people a greater desire for endurance and power to sustain members to learn who they really are.

African American youth face an epidemic when it comes to health issues. The black church is at a point of being lost if those in leadership don't wake up and help. Obesity is at the top of a list of issues for our youth, along with school-related homicides, teen pregnancies, gangs, and child abuse, just to name a few. What will the African American church do to help curb these epidemics?

Dr. Howard Thurman, in *The Search for Common Ground*, writes: "The need to care for and the need to be cared for is another expression of the same basic idea. It is unnecessary to resort to moral or religious authority for the mandate or for an injunction. Such needs are organic; whatever may be their psychological or spiritual derivatives. Therefore, whenever the individual is cut off from the private and personal nourishment from other individuals or from particular individuals, the result is a wasting away, a starvation, a failure of his life to be sustained and nourished."³¹

One recognizes that there is much help when it comes to the supporting of members who are going through the many difficulties and challenges in life. Many members desire support in their daily lives but are not sure how or if they can trust the

³¹ Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1971), xx.

church or communities for the encouragement to find that strength to deal with these mishaps

A key to congregational connectivity is that members can come together to support groups within the congregation; they can reach out and care for those who are hurt. In the book *Studying Congregations*, by Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney, the phrase *dialectical hermeneutic* talks about two different stories offering each other new insight and perspectives. This can be true in our everyday lives where we experience different situations, yet we are able to encourage each another through those life experience.³²

Combating youth obesity within the African American church is a great concern and will have far-reaching effects on the growth and sustainability of the black church. The other great concern is the cost of health care for youth and their ability to function as adults. Children are now hampered by diabetes, hypertension, drug abuse, alcohol, and suicide, which will continue to deplete the growth of the black church.

Dr. Thurman writes: “The human spirit cannot abide the enforced loneliness of isolation. We literally feed on each other, where this nourishment is not available, the human spirit and the human body, both sicken and die. Therefore, whenever the individual is cut off from the private and personal nourishment from other individuals or from particular individuals, the result is a wasting away, a starvation, a failure of his or her life to be sustained and nourished.”³³ How does the church address these concerns?

³² Nancy T. Ammerman, Carroll W. Jackson, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, Eds., *Studying Congregation: A New Handbook*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 26.

³³ Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 3.

How can leadership in the black church help to empower its members educationally so that they actively participate in sound health care practices? These challenges can be addressed with a multifaceted wealth of knowledge that comes through a diverse congregation; more specifically, through support group care and participation.

Ammerman, Carroll, Dudley, and McKinney write that theology is faith seeking understanding, but it must also be about action.³⁴ The knowledge of God we seek is not simply information about God. It is a knowledge that grows out of a relationship with God that cannot but change us, challenging us to examine how we live our lives, drawing us into transformation, calling us to be prophets, and creating a deeper faithfulness.³⁵

African Americans comprise about 12 percent of the population in the United States, or about 37 million people. The world's population is approaching seven billion, and by the year 2050, the worldwide population is expected to top nine billion. African Americans have the highest incidence of illnesses in the United States. Support groups, along with education within African American congregations, can do much to increase longevity among this group.

In the United States, an estimated 23.6 million children and adults have diabetes, or about 8 percent of the population. One in four has not been diagnosed. The total prevalence of diabetes increased 13.5 percent from 2005 to 2007. The total annual economic cost of diabetes in 2007 was estimated to be \$174 billion. Medical expenditures

³⁴ Ammerman, *Studying Congregations*, 23.

³⁵ Ibid.

totaled \$116 billion and were comprised of \$27 billion for diabetes care, \$58 billion for chronic diabetes-related complications, and \$31 billion for excess general medical cost.³⁶

The incidence of heart diseases and strokes are highest among African Americans and account for 65 percent of deaths in people with diabetes.³⁷ Another area that plagues African Americans is nerve damage; diabetic neuropathy puts one at risk for foot injury, infection, and even amputation.³⁸ Empowering congregations, particularly African American youth, is vital to prolonging life and increasing quality of life. This is vital to receiving the promise of three scores and ten that God has promised in his word.³⁹ Therefore, it is imperative that the black church commits to educating youth about the practices of good health and the need to combat obesity.

Dr. Thurman states in his book, “The man or woman who seeks community within his or her own spirit, who searches for it in his or her experiences with the literal facts of the external world, who makes this their formal intent as they seek to bring order out of the chaos of his or her collective life, is not going against life but will be sustained and supported by life.”⁴⁰ The Bible, in Luke 10:33, speaks of the need to care for one another: “But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him.”⁴¹ Childhood obesity is a concern not only for the black church; it is a major problem in the United States as a whole because of its high cost to the

³⁶ American Diabetes Association, “*African Americans and Diabetes*,” 2009.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 6.

⁴¹ The Holy Bible, New International Version.

economy. Youth who are overweight and obese are more likely to be overweight and obese as adults, and this will ultimately affect the quality of life promised by God.

Jesus, in his “Sermon on the Mount,” spoke of how individual’s attitudes should be displayed when it comes to the concerns for others:

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: 2And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”⁴²

From Jesus’ perspective, the focus of the church should be geared toward the concerns of the youth. An individual’s life and commitment must meet the challenges of caring for the least in society—caring for their health and teaching young people how to better care for their minds, bodies, and souls for the work at hand. *Applied theology* is where Christians put into action the Words of Jesus. However, Dr. Thurman continued his writing to pinpoint that the true action and commitment to others should be a concern of the church.⁴³ Church leadership must define more intensively how that action may be described from a congregational perspective in a support group setting.

⁴² The Holy Bible: King James Version, Nashville: Cornerstone Bible Publishers, 1999.

⁴³ Thurman, *The Search For Common Ground*, 5.

Author John C. Maxwell writes in his book, *the 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, that “Nothing of any real value can ever be achieved alone.”⁴⁴ Maxwell teaches that working as a team, whether in professional or personal life, is necessary for achieving success.”⁴⁵ When people and congregations develop working relationships for the overall care of one another, it is because each has developed good working attitudes. The Good Samaritan was more concerned about his neighbor’s health than about his race or status in life. So it is today when Christians engrain in their minds and hearts the need to ensure that the future church—the youth—continue to flourish toward the betterment of God’s future church.

Mr. Maxwell says more concerning ones attitude:

It is the “advance man” of our true selves.

Its roots are inward, but its fruit is outward.

It is our best friend or our worst enemy.

It is more honest and more consistent than our words.

It is an outward look based on past experiences.

It is a thing which draws people to us or repels them.

It is never content until it is expressed.

It is the librarian of our past.

It is the speaker of our present.

It is the prophet of our future.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ John C. Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc.), 6.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 27.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 96.

Mr. Maxwell also talks about the five truths concerning ones attitudes: Attitudes have the power to lift up or tear down a team; an attitude compounds when exposed to others; bad attitudes compound faster than good ones; attitudes are subjective, so identifying a wrong one can be difficult; and rotten attitudes, left alone, ruin everything.⁴⁷

In his book, *the 7 habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen R. Covey writes: “Our paradigms, correct or incorrect, are the sources of our attitudes and behaviors, and ultimately our relationships with each other.”⁴⁸ Mr. Covey went on to discuss how people must become proactive or develop a “think win-win” attitude. When a congregation promotes an attitude that reflects the saying “seek first to understand, then to be understood,” then the Word of God will go forward to heal the wounds of many of its members and communities through support group care.⁴⁹

African Americans continue to have a disproportionately high burden of diseases, disabilities, and deaths. In recent history, African Americans have been emancipated, enfranchised, and empowered politically; they have engaged in a massive migration from rural areas of the South to the urban North; they have realized dramatic economic gains, and have moved from caste segregation to social desegregation. However, far too many die from major health concerns. The historical, demographics, and socioeconomics of

⁴⁷ Ibid. 97-98.

⁴⁸ Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 habits of Highly Effective People*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), xx.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

African Americans provide a context in which to discuss the occurrence of cancer, diabetes, strokes, and hypertension within this group.⁵⁰

African Americans, and African America youth especially, must take on more responsibility for their care, both as individuals and as a group. The African American church must develop a proactive response for caring and teaching their congregations to ensure that their bodies (temples) be used for kingdom building. This may be reflected in educating members through pastoral care, teaching, and involvement in church support groups.

To become a great leader in the church and to lead others to the promises of God, a leader must adopt the teaching of Jesus in Mark 10: 42-44:

But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you; but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.⁵¹

True leadership is found in giving of one's self in service to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you.⁵² It is important for church leaders to continue to lead their congregations, that they learn ways to provide teachable moments to prepare youth—tomorrow's church—to develop good health.

The greatest asset of a leader is the wisdom to consult with the Holy Spirit to develop a keen understanding on how to put others before one's self. Only time will

⁵⁰ National Cancer Institute's, Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) Program. (Miller et al., 1996; Ries et al., 1997; NCI/SEER, 2000).

⁵¹ 10 Mark 42 – 44

⁵² J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 13.

tell how great church leaders will become. The black church, if it is to remain relevant in the lives of youth and adults, must play an active role in their lives and instill members to care for their health. Time is precious; let the church not squander it thoughtlessly. Moses knew time was valuable and prayed to be taught to measure it by days, not by years (Psalm 90:12).⁵³ If persons are careful about the days, the years will take care of themselves.⁵⁴

In summary: youth obesity and the focus of church leaderships are imperative to the success to the black church. If the black church is to continue to be a vital part of its communities, then it must change its attitude toward better health care. Teaching youth to practice better attitudes toward health by eating wholesome, healthy meals and starting physical fitness programs will help to maintain healthier lives and will help to ensure the longevity of the black church.

⁵³ KJV. Psalms 90:12.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 94.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

Please don't touch my fried chicken, fried fish, and pig's feet. This is the type of attitude that churches and their leadership must overcome in order to teach youth the value of healthy eating and healthier lifestyles.

In his book *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education*, Norma Cook Everist makes the point that the church is both local and universal¹: “Where two or three gather in the name of Jesus, Christ is present, but Christ is never present without the companionship of all Christians globally and historically,” she wrote. “The local church implies the universal, and the universal church implies and necessitates the local. Without becoming local, specific in a time and a place, the church does not exist.”²

Below is a list of books and literature that helped the writer formulate this project:

Key Concepts in Health Psychology by Ian P, Albery and Marcus Munafo: Why should health psychologists be interested in epidemiology? Because epidemiology as a discipline in its own right. It is the “study of the distribution and determinants of health

¹ Norma C. Everist, *The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 27.

² Ibid.

and illness in populations and of the action that is necessary to prevent disease and promote health.” This book was used to help formulate questions and discussion for Bible study.

Studying Congregations: A New Handbook by Nancy T. Ammerman, Carroll W. Jackson, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney: “Faith seeking understanding, then, is about all these things: discernment, worship, making sense of our lives and transformative action,” the authors wrote. “Seen in this light, theology is more than an added value that a congregation might seek when everything else is in place. It is really at the heart of the life of the congregation. It helps clarify why a congregation has come together in the first place, why it stays together through good times and bad, and how it responds to the challenges that come its way.”³ This book was used to help formulate Bible study questions for class discussion.

The Medieval Papacy by Geoffrey Barraclough: “It is one of the great paradoxes of history that the papacy, as we think of it today, is in most essential ways a creation of medieval Europe,” Barraclough wrote. “According to the dogma of the Catholic Church, as defined at the First Vatican Council in 1870, the papacy owed its institution to St. Peter, and the Roman pontiff, as St. Peter’s successor, inherited the supreme authority bestowed by Christ upon the ‘prince of the apostles.’ Nevertheless the exercise of this authority, as one of the greatest Catholic canon lawyers of the nineteenth century pointed out, was always subject to circumstances of time and place. Even the concept of papal primacy was only established by slow and painful stages, and many centuries were to

³ Ammerman, *Studying Congregations*, 23-24.

pass after its theoretical formulation in the days of Pope Leo I (440-61) before theory was translated into practice. The establishment of an effective papal monarchy, exercising a ‘plenitude of power’ over the whole Catholic Church, was still far from completion when the twelfth century began.”⁴

The Earliest Records of Jesus by Francis Wright Beare: “Jesus is himself Israel; the people of God is represented in the person of Israel’s appointed King; and he recapitulates in himself the spiritual experience of Israel, with the perfect obedience and the unbroken loyalty to God which Israel had failed to exhibit,” the author wrote. “He was tempted in all points like as we are, but without sin. He alone has steadfastly refused to worship other gods, or to tempt God; and he alone has obeyed entirely the command: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy entire mind.’”⁵

Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change by William Bridges: Change is important to the survival and success of an organization, the author states. In some cases, these changes may go to the very foundation of an organization, not simply wishful desires. “They involve the different technology the organization needs to be competitive, the new structure it needs to be effective, the reduced level of overhead it needs to be profitable. Change is the game today, and organizations that can’t deal with it effectively aren’t likely to be around long.”⁶

⁴ Geoffrey Barraclough, *The Medieval Papacy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1968), 9.

⁵ Francis Wright Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 43.

⁶ William Bridges, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, (New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1991), ix.

The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity by Peter

Brown. “The model of ‘popular religion’ that is usually presented by scholars of late antiquity has the disadvantage that it assumes that ‘popular religion’ can be understood only from the viewpoint of the elite,” Brown Wrote. “ ‘Popular religion’ is presented as in some ways a diminution, a misconception or a contamination of ‘unpopular religion.’ Whether it is presented, bluntly, as ‘popular superstition’ or categorized as ‘lower forms of belief,’ it is assumed that ‘popular religion’ exhibits modes of thinking and worshipping that are best intelligible in terms of a failure to be something else. For failure to accept the guidance of the elite is invariably presented as having nothing to do with any particular appropriateness or meaningful quality in ‘popular’ belief: it is always ascribed to the abiding limitations of ‘the vulgar.’ Popular belief, therefore, can only show itself as a monotonous continuity. It represents an untransformed, unelevated residue of beliefs currents among ‘the ignorant and uninstructed,’ that is, ‘all mankind, a few excepted.’ ”⁷

This book was used to help in preparation and discussion during Bible studying.

Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys by Kennon L.

Callahan. “Leadership is about life; life is about leadership. The two are close companions. One can best understand life as one begins to understand the nature of leadership,” Callahan wrote. “One can best understand the nature of leadership as one comes to understand life in ever-deepening ways.”⁸

⁷ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 19-20.

⁸ Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), xiv.

“...Everyone does not—and should not—live in the same house. Many different blueprints and floor plans are useful and helpful. The art is to discover the foundational principles to build a variety of different houses depending on the mission terrain.

“It is like a book on the foundational principles for how to play football. In football, there are lots of different ways of winning games and lots of different plays. Some how-to books for churches advocate that one play is the way forward. They have discovered that it works very well in one specific situation. They then assume that one play will work everywhere, for everybody, on all parts of the mission field.

“No football team I know of runs the same play on every down of every quarter of every game. A successful team relies on a variety of plays. But underneath all the plays is a range of sound foundational principles telling how to play the game.”⁹

In African American Christian Worship, Melva Wilson Costen notes that, “African American Christians gathered and engaged in worship, regardless of denomination, share many things in common...First and foremost, they gather to offer thanks and praise to God in and through Jesus the Christ, and to be spiritually fed by the Word of God! In response to God’s call and by God’s grace, communities of faith gather to affirm God’s providence and power. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, African Americans express their corporate and personal belief that God in Jesus Christ continues to work for good in every aspect of their lives. There is an ethos of beloved community as the “extended family” recalls and celebrates freedom in Christ. Aware of the mysterious

⁹ Ibid, xii.

presence of the living Christ, the community is empowered to live the good news in the world.”¹⁰

Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults by Patricia Cranton writes, “Working with others is more comfortable for people who are more extraverted,” Cranton continued to write, “In the current climate of teamwork and participatory decision making, avoiding groups is all but impossible. Even if it does not come naturally, most people have learned to work with groups. Based on psychological type theory, one would predict that a tendency toward extraverted feelings would lead to the strongest interest in working with groups. Conversely, an inclination toward introverted thinking could lead to discomfort in groups. However, the nature of group work is also relevant.”¹¹

Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches by John W. Creswell: “The third major element in the framework is the specific research methods that involve the forms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation that researchers propose for their studies,” Creswell wrote. It is useful to consider the full range of possibilities of data collection and organize these methods, for example, by their degree of predetermined nature, their use of closed-ended versus open-ended questioning, and their focus on numeric versus nonnumeric data analysis.”¹²

¹⁰ Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 13.

¹¹ Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning*, 200.

¹² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 15.

The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive guide to Christian

Education Norma Cook Everist. Dr. Everist writes that learning has a threefold purpose: to put forth a vision of the entire parish as a learning community; to help faith communities create and maintain learning environments that facilitate us being different together in a pluralistic world; and to provide a comprehensive guide for religious educators leading a congregation toward fully becoming a learning community.

Race, Gender & Rhetoric: The True State of Race and Gender Relations in

Corporate America by John P. Fernandez. Most corporate employees, especially corporate leaders, believe that they have a good understanding of the concept of diversity and of the need to rid their organizations of racism, sexism, and all other *isms*. Most, in fact, insist that they and their organizations have largely taken care of the problems of racism and sexism, that they have mastered affirmative action and awareness training and that it is now time to stop harping on the issue and get down to the real work of the organization. Sometimes they admit that racism and sexism still exist, but always in the other person's company, never in their own. This book was used for discussion in Bible study class.

A History of Black Baptists by Leroy Fitts. "Authentically, the tradition of black

Baptists is auspiciously pregnant with wholesome instruction, principles, and precepts for lay church leaders, pastors, teachers, and students of Christian culture," the author wrote. "Its many narratives of the lives and deeds of energetic, intelligent, Christian men and women are well calculated to impart useful knowledge, beget lofty aspirations, and direct

the life of each serious-minded student of black religious culture to high, manly, womanly achievements.”¹³

This book was used to help formulate questions for bible study classes.

The Black Health Library Guide to Diabetes by Lester Henry: “Thirty-five hundred years ago, somewhere in the fertile northeast tip of Africa, someone decided to compile a written record of what the ancient Egyptians knew about medicine,” Henry wrote. “At the time, Egypt’s prowess in anatomy and surgery rivaled its legendary advances in engineering, mathematics, and astronomy, and the scribe must have sensed the importance of preserving this precious knowledge. But as he put pen to papyrus, little did he know that he was recording the very first account of diabetes. One thousand years before the birth of Hippocrates—the man widely but perhaps incorrectly considered the ‘father of Medicine,’—a brown-skinned scribe was the first to tell the world about a bizarre disease that caused ‘the passing of too much urine.’”¹⁴

This book was used to help formulate the survey questions for this project.

Overweight: A Handbook for Teens and Parents, by Tania Heller. “As a teenager, you are constantly exposed to influences that can have an impact on the way you feel about your body,” the author wrote. “Magazines portray images of very muscular men and impossibly thin women. Television shows and movies feature leading ladies and leading men who often conform to a certain beauty ideal. Most young people who strive

¹³ Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), Preface.

¹⁴ Lester Henry, *The Black Health Library Guide to Diabetes*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 1.

to look like these models and actors are unlikely to achieve their goal, and are more likely to end up frustrated—or even worse—with an eating disorder.”¹⁵

This book was used to help formulate the questions used for pre-test and post-test.

The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant by Gary Inrig: ““A Christian is someone who lives outside himself. He lives in Christ by faith and in his neighbor by love,”” Inrig quoted Martin Luther as having said. “But the Lord Jesus refuses to allow His call to love to degenerate into a sentimental slogan. He modeled love in His life, and He describes love in one of the most powerful stories ever told, a story we know as the parable of the Good Samaritan as found in Luke 10.”¹⁶

This book was used to develop several sermons that address church members’ attitudinal change toward better health care. It also was used to assist in the writer’s material for sermons.

Christian Mysticism East and West: What the Masters Teach Us by Maria Jaoudi: “Following initial conversion, in the quieting of spiritual advancement and in that homecoming of rest in the depths of experiencing God’s transformative healing, light deepens into awareness,” Jaoudi wrote. “Light as awareness of divine presence creates a radiant love, healing one’s internal divisions and wounds and eventually helping one to

¹⁵ Tania Heller, *Overweight: A Handbook for Teens and Parents*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2001), 44.

¹⁶ Gary Inrig, *The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1991), 30.

become that sacred presence that one has begun to be conscious of at the core of one's being."¹⁷

The New Interpreter's Bible by Leander E. Keck: "In Christian theology, the canon of Scripture refers to the list of sacred books that serves as the rule or norm of Christian faith and life," Keck wrote. "The word *canon* derives from the Greek *kanon* (Hebrew *qaneh*), which means "reed" or "measuring stick." One sense of *kanon* was "ruler,"—that by which straightness could be measured. The idea of measure in *canon* opened up the term to various metaphorical uses in literature, art, and music, as well as in commerce and in making chronological tables... The notion of canon as rule or norm of faith and life predominated among Christian writers of the first three centuries CE."¹⁸

This book was used in preparing for bible study and sermon preparations.

Making the Most of Your Life: Eight Motivational Stories and Essays by John Langan. "Consider the basic truth about human nature: We all want to respect ourselves. We all want to live our lives in such a way that we think well of our behavior and others think well of us," the author wrote. "We do not want to be disrespected or seen as bad people. An equally basic truth is that the only way we can get respect is to earn it."¹⁹

This book was used to help the writer in developing sermon materials as part of treatment.

¹⁷ Maria Jaoudi, *Christian Mysticism East and West: What the Masters Teach Us*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 32.

¹⁸ Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 7.

¹⁹ John Langan, *Making the Most of Your Life: Eight Motivational Stories and Essays*, (West Berlin, NJ: Townsend Press Inc., 2008), 75.

Consumer Reports: The Best of Health by Marvin M. Lipman. “There’s no such thing as ‘spot reduction’ exercises that zero in on fat in a specific area. When you work out, you use energy produced by burning fat from all over your body—not just around the muscles doing the most work. So aside from burning a few calories, all that exercises such as sit-ups do is strengthen your abdominal muscles and help hold your gut in. However, studies do suggest that people losing weight—whether through any sort of exercise, calorie reduction, or both—tend to shed abdominal fat faster than fat from other parts of the body. That’s good news, not only for your appearance, but also for your health: Abdominal fat seems to pose a higher risk of coronary heart disease than fat deposited in other areas.”²⁰

This book was used to help in the formulation of survey questions.

Martin Luther King Jr: On Creative Living by Michael G. Long. This book hits the heart of the matter when it comes to how Christians care for one another through love. Dr. Long makes the point that “The eternal God of love, justice, order, and power has chosen to enter the history of our life, right here and right now, to give us the strength and direction we need for traveling on the road to the Promised Land—a beloved community that reflects the love and justice found within the character of God.”²¹

This book was used to help the author develop sermon material as part of treatment.

²⁰ Marvin M. Lipman, *Consumer Reports: The Best of Health*, (New York: Consumers Union of United States Inc, 2001), 210.

²¹ Michael G. Long, *Martin Luther King Jr: On Creative Living*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 33.

The Oxford Guide to Library Research by Thomas Mann. “The best way to start many inquiries is to see if someone has already written an overview articles outlining the most important facts on a subject and providing a concise list of recommended reading,” the author wrote. “This is precisely what a good encyclopedia article does. Unlike most Web sites, encyclopedia entries have usually gone through a process of editorial review and fact checking by reputable publishers; in addition, the selection of encyclopedia by libraries is in itself another hurdle of review; in addition, the selection of encyclopedias by libraries is in itself another hurdle of review. One of the main problems with Internet searching is that it often generates so many results that, in spite of elaborate algorithms for ranking the retrieved pages, researchers are left without any coherent overview of the information they need. This problem, so intractable on the Net, is often solved quickly and easily by use of encyclopedias.”²²

This book was used to help in the writing and formulation of this paper.

Health Psychology: Theory, Research and Practice by David F. Marks. Dr. Marks suggest that it is generally agreed today that the psychosomatic approach in psychoanalysis and the proponents of psychosomatic medicine failed to produce convincing evidence of causal connections between psychological characteristics and physical illness, or to demonstrate that their therapeutic interventions were effective (Holroyd and Coyne, 1987). They were criticized for much the same reasons that psychoanalysis has been criticized more generally (Webster, 1995). Their theories were highly speculative and relied on elaborate interpretations of clinical data rather than

²² Thomas Mann, *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1.

controlled statistical studies. They also suffered from the defect of being retrospective, seeking to explain patients illnesses as caused by psychological characteristics already known to the clinician, rather than prospective, making predictions about future illness on the basis of present psychological assessments.

Black Preaching: The Recovery Of A Powerful Art by Henry H. Mitchell: “The key to understanding the different styles of preaching is in the word *culture*: Preaching is carried out in the idiom, imagery, style, and worldview of a particular people,” Mitchell wrote. “The most obvious aspect of cultural differences is often in the very language used in preaching, whether Spanish or Twi or Arabic. But within a given language group such as English, there may exist a host of subgroups, each with an entirely different set of experiences to bring to the meanings of the very same vocabulary...Culture is the accumulation over time of all the wisdom and methods of a given cultural group, for the purpose of ensuring its survival. Each group has a menu of acceptable foods, a collection of proper hairstyles and attire, a way to greet people, ways to sing music and tell stories, and ways to build homes and rear children.”²³

This book was consulted during the development of the treatment of the project.

Restore Me: 40 Healing Sermons by Mankekolo Mahlangu-Ngcobo: Dr.

Mahlangu-Ngcobo wrote that, “While we are Christians and not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16) we are not to look down on other people who do not share their faith. At the restoration moment, we were healed from racism, sexism, classism and

²³ Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery Of A Powerful Art*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 11-12.

all aspects of discrimination.”²⁴ He went on to say, “God has allowed us to witness an honorable restoration moment. Let us move with a moment to fulfill the mission of hope, to create a ministry of helps and a movement to heal ourselves, families, communities and the world.”²⁵

This book was consulted during the development of the treatment of the project. Also, this book was used to assist in the development of the author’s sermons preparation.

Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry by Thomas C. Oden. “Pastoral theology is a special form of practical theology because it focuses on the practice of ministry, with particular attention to the systematic definition of the pastoral office and its function,” the author wrote. “Pastoral theology is also a form of systematic theology, because it attempts a systematic, consistent reflection on the offices and gifts of ministry, and their integral relationship with the tasks of ministry. Pastoral theology is distinguishable, yet inseparable, from exegesis, historical and systematic theology, ethics, liturgics, and psychology of religion. Even though it interweaves insights from all these disciplines into its understanding of the practice of ministry, it deserves to be viewed as a distinctive discipline.”²⁶

This book helped the author look at ways to engage youth for discussions.

²⁴ Mankekolo Mahlangu-Ngcobo, *Restore Me: 40 Healing Sermons*, (New York: Universe Inc., 2010), 12.

²⁵ Ibid. 13.

²⁶ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*, (San Francisco: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1961), xx.

From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded by Andrew Sung Park: This book takes on a deeper meaning of what sin (Han) is and how people can violate God's commandment by living beneath their abilities. Obesity is simply that—a sin that prevents adults and youth from reaching their full potential and quality of life. Dr. Park states: "The cross represents the many innocent victims who have suffered injustice and oppression. It is the symbol of God's *han*. Jesus' cross does not reveal a God who causes human suffering, but rather a God who suffers alongside us. It is the sign of God's great advocacy for the victims of abuse, violence, and unjust oppression, opposing abusive power unto death. The cross offers healing to victims who see God's solidarity and woundedness with them. It offers salvation to offenders by calling them to repent of their sins. The crucifixion signifies God as the victim of human injustice and violence."²⁷

This book was used to assist in the development of the author's sermons preparation.

Gluttony: The Seven Deadly Sins by Francine Prose: "It's hard to imagine a similar event occurring in any century besides our own," Prose wrote. "It seems so quintessentially modern, so current and of the moment. What would Thomas Aquinas or Saint Augustine have made of that lunch, or, for that matter, of a world in which women called ahead with directives concerning the mini-bar contents? And yet, had the event taken place a thousand years in the past—let's say, at an early church council or synod—

²⁷ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded*, (Nashville: Adingdon Press, 2004), 28.

it would more likely have been recognized for what it really was, as something more substantial than a casual chat about body image and diet.”²⁸

This book was used to help in developing bible study discussion.

Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth by Charles C. Ryrie: “Historically, the two avenues through which God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself have been labeled general and special revelation,” Ryrie wrote. “General revelation includes all that God has revealed in the world around us, including man, while special revelation includes various means He used to communicate His message in what was codified in the Bible. General revelation is sometimes called natural theology, and special revelation is called revealed theology. But, of course, what is revealed in nature is also revealed in theology. Some writers use the labels prelapsarian for general revelation and postlapsarian or soteric for special revelation. However, both general and special revelations are (a) from God and (b) about God.”²⁹

Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence For Every Believer by J. Oswald Sanders. “How interesting that the Gospel accounts contain no hint of any interruption ever disturbing the serenity of the Son of God,” the author wrote. “Few things are more likely to produce tension in a busy life than unexpected interruptions. Yet to Jesus there were no such things. ‘Unexpected’ events were always foreseen in the Father’s planning,

²⁸ Francine Prose, *Gluttony: The Seven Deadly Sins*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

²⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 31.

and Jesus was therefore undisturbed by them. True, at times there was hardly time to eat, but time was always sufficient to accomplish all the Father's will."³⁰

Listening & Caring Skills: A Guide for Groups and Leaders by John Savage. The author noted five ways to receive information through interpersonal communication. They are.

“Direct and Open Feedback: Communication takes place openly and completely between parties or groups. Energy is produced and feelings are positive or resolved. Data is checked for accuracy. The relationships are productive and useful.

“Open but Partial Communication: Communication takes place openly, but some key information is left out. What is communicated is checked out, but the listener is left making some assumptions around the missing information. Or the listener assumes that what was said was complete.

“Distorted Full Information: Communication is fully developed, but many distortions of reality are present. The listeners either are forced to believe the distortions as reality or must fill in their own inferences.

“Distorted and Deleted Information: This mode of communication requires listeners to fill in large gaps of information from their own assumptions. Because much of the information is distorted, the listeners may have difficulty trying to decide what is reality-based and what is projection or conjecture.

“Nonverbal communication: Communication of the verbal style is cut off completely. Individuals expend considerable energy in denial activity. The listeners are

³⁰ Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 97.

left with only inferences, assumptions, and conjectures, which may not have any reality base.”³¹

This book was used to help with the questions discuss during Bible studying.

Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present, by Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas: “The second principle of black preaching is that the Bible is made to come literally alive by means of an eyewitness style of picture painting and narration,” the authors wrote. “The preacher has studied and meditated on the Bible to a point where the Bible is not only ideas, but visual images. These images can be easily remembered and delivered, without notes, to an audience, which then shares in the preacher’s experience. Faith is transmitted holistically, viscerally rather than only intellectually, as art rather than as argument. The preachers strive for sincere faith based on religious experience, moving hearers to a relationship with the Divine.”³²

The author of this project desires to show youth and parents how obesity reflects the bad side of religious experience with the images of bad health. This book was used to help develop Bible studying questions.

Becoming A Fruit-Bearing Disciple by Terry Thomas. Dr. Thomas wrote: “The importance of knowing why the church exists, its purpose, and what it is supposed to do cannot be over-stressed. ‘Your purpose,’ says Dr. Lance Watson, ‘defines what business you’re in as well as none of your business.’ This is important because the church, like the

³¹ John Savage, *Listening & Caring Skills: A Guide for Groups and Leaders*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 15-16.

³² Martha Simmons and Frank A. Thomas, *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 7.

restaurant, can easily be sidetracked and forget its primary mission or foundational purpose. Then ‘too often...we expect the wrong things from the church—in part because members are not clear about its purpose.’”³³

This book was used to assist in preparing the group with the development treatment phase of the project. This book also was used to assist with Bible study classes.

Making It Through A Storm by Terry Thomas: Dr. Thomas points out in this book that, “There are certain harm and losses in our lives that we do not want to experience. It is extremely hard to regain or repair certain things in our lives that have become lost or damaged.” Health is one of those things. “This is the reason why self-imposed storms must be avoided!”³⁴ Thomas continued. Obesity is a self-imposed storm that can be avoided if church leadership educates adults and youth concerning proper health.

This book was used to assist in preparing the group with the development treatment phase of the project.

Body Image, Eating Disorders, and Obesity in Youth: Assessment, Prevention, and Treatment by J. Kevin Thompson and Linda Smolak: “A brief review of prevalence data may give some indication of the number of children and adolescents who experience clinical or subclinical symptoms of eating disturbance,” the author wrote. “Scores of descriptive studies and surveys have been conducted detailing levels of appearance dissatisfaction, restrictive eating practices, bulimic symptoms, and related symptoms of body image disturbance and eating disorders. In addition, well-designed investigations

³³ Terry Thomas, *Becoming A Fruit-Bearing Disciple*, (Raleigh, NC: Voice of Rehoboth Publishing, 2005), 28.

³⁴ Terry Thomas, *Making It Through A Storm*, (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010), 15.

have yielded data on the prevalence of children and adolescents who meet agreed on criteria for obesity or an eating disorder. Dieting, a behavior common to eating disorders as well as obesity, may be a good place to begin this discussion.”³⁵

The Search for Common Ground by Howard Thurman: “The need to care for and the need to be cared for is another expression of the same basic idea,” Thurman wrote. “It is unnecessary to resort to moral or religious authority for a mandate or for an injunction. Such needs are organic, whatever may be their psychological or spiritual derivatives. Therefore, whenever the individual is cut off from the private and personal nourishment from other individuals or from particular individuals, the result is a wasting away, a starvation, a failure of his life to be sustained and nourished.”³⁶

Quality: Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology, by Nancy Jean Vyhmeister. This book helped the writer develop a more comprehensive observation of how to conduct research and apply the information into dissertation method. Research can be defined as a method of study that, through careful investigation of all evidence bearing on a definable problem, arrives at the solution. To research a topic is to collect, organize, evaluate, and present data. In her book, Vyhmeister offered a four-part definition of research is given by Isaac Felipe Azofeifa: “Research is a (1) systematic search for (2) adequate information to reach (3) objective knowledge of a (4) specific topic.”³⁷

³⁵ J. Kevin Thompson and Linda Smolak, *Body Image, Eating Disorders, and Obesity in Youth: Assessment, Prevention, and Treatment*, (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2001), 2-3.

³⁶ Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 3.

³⁷ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality: Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 1.

A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. by James M. Washington: African American youth who suffer from obesity risk the same types of discrimination that blacks suffered during the Civil Rights Movement. In this book, the author wrote: “Negroes have also experienced sharp frustrations as they struggle for the realization of promises expressed in hollow legislative enactments or empty electoral campaign oratory.”³⁸

Churches today must not missed out on an opportunity to nourish youth—and the future church—back to good health by promoting wholesome lifestyles.

The Christians as the Romans Saw Them by Robert Louis Wilken: “The phrase used by Pliny, ‘make offerings of wine and incense,’ has a long history in Roman religion. Centuries earlier, on the occasion of national catastrophes such as natural disasters or defeat in war, or at times of public jubilation, such as after victory in war, the people of Rome flocked to the temples to beseech the gods for aid or to celebrate their good fortune,” the author wrote. “On these occasions the supplicants used the common form of unbloody offering of wine and incense, as they were accustomed to do in their homes when worshipping the family Lares. What originally occurred only on exceptional occasions gradually became regularized as a common form of worship. Supplications (the technical term) became a standard type of religious act to commemorate memorable events such as the birth or accession of an emperor, the anniversary of a battle, and similar occasions. Because an offering that consisted of pouring wine over an altar and dropping grain was much less expensive than the slaughter and roasting of a pig or a bull,

³⁸ James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), 96.

it gained in popularity as a simple form of devotion to the gods. ...Tiberius, himself followed the practice on accession to the throne. “On the first day that he entered the senate after the death of Augustus, to satisfy at once the demands of piety and religion, he offered sacrifice with incense and wine.”³⁹

³⁹Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians As The Romans Saw Them*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 26.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Fundamental to the doctrines of the Christian church is the belief that the human body should be treated as a living temple to Christ. Therefore, the theoretical underpinning of the church's fight against obesity is the translational shift from simply preaching that doctrine to actually living it.

This holistic approach must first be embraced by church leaders, and then taught to congregations.

Although the obesity epidemic has garnered widespread attention in recent years, the study of obesity has a long history. The concept of a *body mass index*—a ratio used to measure excess body fat—can be traced to Adolphe Quetelet, a Belgian scientist, in 1835.¹ Likewise, the first widely read book advocating a low-carbohydrate diet as a means of controlling body weight was written by William Bantling, an obese English undertaker, in 1863.²

Milos Pesic, a contemporary fitness guru who has written extensively on the topics of diet and weight loss, defines obesity as “fatness in a degree higher than (simply

¹ Internet, The American Physiological Society, www.the-aps.org, (Accessed Nov. 4, 2011)

² Ibid.

being) overweight.”³ He went on to state that obesity may have serious implications on an individual’s physical health, leading to various degenerative diseases. Even worse, he said, may be the impact on an individual’s mental health.⁴

Throughout history, he wrote, humans have shaped and formed various views concerning obesity:

Ancient Egyptians are said to consider obesity as a disease, having been drawn in a wall of depicted illnesses. Perhaps the most famous and earliest evidence of obesity is the Venus figurines, statuettes of an obese female torso that probably had a major role in rituals. Ancient China have [sic] also been aware of obesity and the dangers that come with it. They have always been a believer in prevention as a key to longevity. The Aztecs believed that obesity was supernatural, an affliction of the gods. Hippocrates, the father of medicine, was aware of sudden deaths being more common among obese men than lean ones as stated in his writings. In certain cultures and areas where food is scarce and poverty is prevalent, obesity is viewed as a symbol of wealth and social status. To date, an African tribe purposely plumps up a bride to prepare her for child bearing. Before a wedding can be set, a slim bride is pampered to gain weight until she reaches the suitable weight.⁵

Ironically, various studies of early hunter-gatherer societies report no instances of obesity: “Life was marked by much physical activity to secure adequate food, interspersed seasonally with decreased food intake.”⁶ But as modern societies developed,

³ Milos Pesic, The History of Obesity, <http://ezinearticles.com/?The-History-of-Obesity&id=357342> (Accessed November 21, 2011).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Food*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1067.

along with the production of high-carbohydrate food crops, “evolution began to favor those who were able to store energy as fat to carry them through lean times.”⁷

Indeed, scientists have described obesity as the first “disease of civilization” to appear in humans.⁸

In the United State, attitudes toward overweight individuals have changed as well over time, according to the Cambridge World History of Food, Vol. 1.:⁹

In general, when food was scarce, such individuals were viewed as prosperous and envied by their neighbors. By contrast, in times and societies with ample food, fashion usually favored slim and lean figures. In many instances, however, no moral judgments were attached to either overweight or lean status.¹⁰

By the turn of the twentieth century, “scientists had come to believe that body fat had its origins in the fat of foods consumed and that dietary fat passed unchanged through the digestive tract to be absorbed and deposited. Fat was again out of fashion.”¹¹

Along with this attitude change came a change in the way Americans related to food. Those who hoped to maintain health and vitality were encouraged to exercise and limit food intake.

Indeed, along with the ages-old battle to maximize mental, physical, and spiritual wellbeing come the notion of dietary restraint.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. 1969.

Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

In the book *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and Christian Diet*, authors David Grumett and Rachel Muers wrote that Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; Moses fasted twice on the mountain where he received the commandment; the people of Israel under Samuel fasted at Mizpah before submitting to the Philistines; and Daniel and his Hebrew companions survived on vegetables and water while in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.¹²

Jesus himself, according to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, inaugurated his ministry by undergoing forty days of testing by Satan in the desert, then resisted the temptation to turn stones into bread.¹³

This researcher began this chapter with the presupposition and understanding that Christians' bodies are the temple of God. Therefore, it is imperative that church leaders emphasize the importance of complete healthcare—which includes healthy eating but does not end there—as they develop holistic ministries aimed at addressing the spiritual and physical needs of their congregants.

This researcher believes that any affective ministry that addresses obesity must consist of a three-pronged approach—exercise, healthy eating, and addressing the psychological factors that sometimes cause individuals to overeat.

Healthy eating implies more than simply limiting intake or avoiding foods that are deemed unhealthy (i.e., those that contain excessive levels of sodium, saturated fats, and other unhealthy elements); It also means favoring foods that enhance health.

¹² David Grumett and Rachel Muers. *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat and Christian Diet*, (New York: Routledge Taylor & French, 2010), 3.

¹³ Ibid.

Angela Montford, in her book *Health, Sickness, Medicine and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, wrote that food played a vital role in the lives and health of friars in the middle ages. In fact, she wrote, food was used at times to treat illness:

In his surgical treatise, *the Cyrurgia*, (c. 1265), the Dominican surgeon Theodoric of Bologna quoted the classical physician Galen's hierarchy of medical treatment, naming in order diet, medicines, and surgery...of which diet was considered the first and the best: 'if we can cure a man by diet we should not cure him with any draught.'¹⁴

Of those early friars, Montford wrote: "The question of balance was the crux of the matter, not harming the body or the soul through the extremes of excessive fasting, inadequate diet or greed but supplying enough food to maintain health."¹⁵

There is no denying that food—and thus the temptation to overeat—is everywhere in affluent, Western culture. More often than not, modern pantries and refrigerators are all but bursting with various culinary delights. Grocery stores, in some instances, sell multiple brands of the same food products. Entire television shows, and indeed entire networks, are devoted strictly to food.

In the book *Gluttony*, Francine Prose described attending a midtown Manhattan luncheon hosted by two women who were writing a book about women and their attitudes toward their bodies and food. Although none in attendance that day was obese, "...many of them described their relationship with food as a ferocious, lifelong battle for

¹⁴ Angela Montford, *Health, Sickness, Medicine and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 176.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 179

power and control.”¹⁶ Indeed, the author recalled, most spent more time talking anxiously about food rather than actually eating:

It’s hard to imagine a similar event occurring in any century besides our own. It seems so quintessentially modern, so current and of the moment. What would Thomas Aquinas or Saint Augustine have made of that lunch, or, for that matter, of a world in which women call ahead with directives concerning mini-bar contents?¹⁷

What seemed on the surface to have been simply a conversation about food, Prose said, was, in reality, something much deeper, something more spiritual dealing with “sin and virtue, abstinence, self-control, and the daunting challenge of overcoming the fierce temptations of gluttony.”¹⁸

Prose contends that in modern times—beginning with the Renaissance period and continuing through the Industrial Revolution—gluttony lost much of its stigma as humans began to shift their focus from heaven to earth and “adjusted the goals of labor to include the rewards of this world as well as those of the next...”¹⁹ In fact, she continued, “the ability to afford the most lavish pleasures of the table became visible signs of vitality, prosperity, and of the worldly success to which both the captains and the humble foot soldiers of industry were encouraged to aspire.”²⁰

¹⁶ Francine Prose, *Gluttony*: (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

The Christian Church has long recognized that certain thoughts, actions, and deeds were displeasing to God. Thus was developed the list commonly known as the Seven Deadly Sins—pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust. But gluttony and lust, unlike the remaining five, are closely allied with human survival.²¹ Without food, humans starve; without lust, the species perishes.

So what approach should leaders in the modern church take to address the problem of overeating, a destructive habit so closely aligned with a basic need for human survival? Prose offered this:

Because hunger and sexual desire are essential human instincts, even the church fathers—those tireless warriors against the stirrings of biological impulse—were obligated to recognize that lust and gluttony could not be addressed and combated in quite the same way in which the faithful were advised to struggle against the demons of pride, envy, greed. Sagely, the fourth century monastic theologians John Cassian referred to these natural proclivities, gluttony and lust, as illnesses that require complex cures.²²

In January 1984, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services established the Task Force on Black and Minority Health in response to a national paradox: While the overall health of Americans was improving, “substantial inequities” existed for African Americans and other minorities.²³ A comprehensive study was launched to determine the root causes behind the long-standing disparities between the health status

²¹ Ibid, 8.

²² Ibid.

²³ Internet, Centers for Disease Control, “Perspectives in Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Black and Minority Health,” <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00000688.htm> (Last accessed August 18, 2011).

of U.S. blacks, Hispanics, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans as compared to that of whites.

The task force estimated that as many as 60,000 “excess deaths” occurred each year in minority communities. Eighty percent of those excess mortalities were traced to six causes. At least three of those causes—cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes—have been found, in some cases, to have a direct link to diet. The remaining three causes were homicides and accidents, chemical dependency, and infant mortality.

Today, although life expectancy and overall health for all Americans has generally improved, African Americans and other minority groups have not kept pace. As recently as 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the following:²⁴

- The infant death rate among African Americans is still more than double that of whites.
- Heart disease death rates are more than 40 percent higher for African Americans than for whites.
- The death rate for all cancers is 30 percent higher for African Americans than for whites; for prostate cancer, it is more than double.
- African American women have a higher death rate from breast cancer, despite having a mammography-screening rate that is nearly the same as the rate for white women.
- The death rate from HIV/AIDS for African Americans is more than seven times that for whites; the rate of homicide is six times that for whites.

²⁴ Ibid.

In addressing the economic and social importance of those disparities, the CDC offered this:

The demographic changes anticipated over the next decade magnify the importance of addressing disparities in health status. Groups currently experiencing poorer health status are expected to grow as a proportion of the total U.S. population; therefore, the future health of America as a whole will be influenced substantially by improving the health of these racial and ethnic minorities.²⁵

The link between poor health and obesity is undeniable. In 2009, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) reported the following:²⁶

- More than 80 percent of people with Type 2 diabetes are overweight.
- People who are overweight are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, high levels of blood fats, and LDL cholesterol—all risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

For the purposes of this project, the researcher, when using the words *obese* and *overweight*, has adopted the standards identified by HHS:

- Persons are considered *overweight* when they obtain a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25 or greater.
- Persons are considered *obese* when they obtain a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or greater.

African American women, according to HHS, were 60 percent more likely to be obese than their non-Hispanic white counterparts and held the highest obesity rate in the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Internet, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Obesity and African Americans,” <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/content.aspx?ID=6456>, (Accessed on August 18, 2011).

nation²⁷. Data suggests that this problem finds its roots in early childhood. According to the same HHS report, African American children were 30 percent more likely to be obese than their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

Not only were African American youth more likely to be overweight and obese, they also were less physically active.²⁸

Given the number of African American females who regularly attend various worship services, this researcher is convinced that the African American church must be on the front line in the nation's fight against obesity. Furthermore, this effort must begin with African American youth.

History suggests that African Americans may face an especially daunting challenge as it relates to diet and weight control. Ever since the first Africans arrived in the New World aboard slave ships, they have been fed diets contributory to excessive weight gain. Indeed, what started as meals necessitated by the social and economic conditions of slavery have evolved into high-fat diets that today are often associated with the style of cooking often preferred by African Americans, i.e., *soul food*.²⁹

Although some slaves kept garden plots or animals to supplement their diets, most subsisted on rations given to them by their white slave masters, and those rations

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kenneth F. Kiple and Kriemhild Conee Ornelas, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Food*, Vol. 2, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1311.

provided a “relatively monotonous diet of salt pork, maize meal, and, sometimes, molasses or sweet potatoes.”³⁰

Whether or not the diet of black slaves was adequate has long been debated, but one conclusion is that although adequate in calories, it lacked sufficient protein and vitamins. Protein-calorie malnutrition and vitamin deficiencies are attested to by contemporary evidence.

For the slave owner, in contrast, excess was more often the rule. *The Cambridge World History of Food, Vol., 2* described one of the extravagant dishes—the Carolina Wedding Cake—made in 1850, “which called for, among other things, 20 pounds each of sugar, butter, flour and raisins, as well as 20 nutmegs and 20 glasses of brandy.”³¹

One author has estimated that it would have required 1,500 eggs and weighed a total of 900 pounds. Similar excesses were evident among cooks who deep-fried entire turkeys and garnished tables with great bowls of turtle steaks, merely to whet appetites. One dinner on record featured ham, turkey, chicken, duck, corned beef, fish, sweet potatoes, ‘Irish’ potatoes, cabbage rice, beets, 8 pies, syllabub, jelly, ‘floating island,’ and preserves. Peach brandy and corn whisky washed all of this down.³²

Even in 2011, finding nutritious food in sufficient quantities remains a challenge for many African Americans, most notably those who live in low-income communities.

Experts in nutrition estimate that millions of low-income adults and children live in what are commonly called *food deserts*. A *food desert* is described as a low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store. As a result, these families are often forced to consume

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 1312.

³² Ibid.

less-nutritious food items from corner stores or neighborhood shops that seldom carry fresh meats, fruits, and vegetables.

In Cumberland County, North Carolina, where the researcher conducted much of this project at the Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, experts have identified at least six areas classified as food deserts, the largest of which contains nearly 32,000 residents—62 percent of whom have “low access” to supermarkets.³³

One of the church’s major challenges in the twenty-first century and beyond will be to undertaking holistic approaches to ministry. In addition to the all-important task of preaching the gospel, the church must become more concerned about the total welfare of members. In this researcher’s experience, little emphasis has been given, so far, to the health concerns of church attendees, especially the youth.

Young people today face a growing challenge to remain fit. Not only are unhealthy junk foods more readily available, today’s youth also face fewer opportunities for organized fitness programs, especially since physical education programs have been eliminated from most public schools. Add to this the sedentary lifestyles of today’s youth that so often revolve around television, video games and smart phones, and the result is an alarming rise in the rate of obesity.

The Centers for Disease Control recommends that children ages six to seventeen get sixty minutes or more of physical activity each day; the daily recommended amount

³³ Internet, United States Department of Agriculture, “Food Desert Locator,” <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/fooddesert.html> (Accessed August 19, 2011).

for adults age eighteen to sixty-four is 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or seventy-five minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.³⁴

Soon after the 2008 presidential election, First Lady Michelle Obama made exercise and healthy eating two issues she would champion with American youth while in the White House. In a September, 2010, interview published in *Ladies Home Journal*, she talked about the challenges of raising healthy children while being a working mom in Chicago:

As a working mom I lived through what a lot of working families are dealing with. You have your job. Your kids are going in 50 million different directions. You're trying to fix dinner, doing things on the go. You are eating out more, because you don't have time to cook. I saw the toil it was taking not just on how my family looked but on how we felt.³⁵

Mrs. Obama said that even in the White House, she and President Obama make time daily for exercise, and they encourage their daughters to stay active, even if it's simply chasing the dog down the hallway. To keep children active, she said, exercise must be fun, not a chore. She said she and the president limit their children's access to television and require them to finish their vegetables. While she is aware of the obesity epidemic and the problems it causes, Mrs. Obama said that, when teaching her daughters about exercise and diet, she never couches it in terms of weight control.

It is a sensitive issue. My girls are preteens and they're seeing their bodies in a whole different way. We have conversations around health, food, and activity. I tell them sports are something I want them to engage in because it's good for them. It's good to

³⁴ Internet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Physical Activity for Everyone," <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html> (Accessed August 19, 2001).

³⁵ Sally lee, "Michelle Obama's New Mission," *Ladies Home Journal*, (September 2010), 118.

practice teamwork, to understand what it means to suffer a loss, to win with grace. It has nothing to do with weight, it has everything to do with being a well-rounded person. Also, I have them do a sport that they like and a sport that I like. I want them to understand what it feels like to do something you don't like and to improve. Because in life you don't always get to do the things you want.³⁶

Shawna Vogel, in the book *The Skinny on Fat: Our Obsession with Weight Control*, writes that as a society, Americans are more health conscious than ever before, yet one in four Americans is considered obese. “The confusing bombardment of information we receive daily about diet and exercise,” he said, “has done little to answer the perennial question: What’s the best way to lose weight?”³⁷

This researcher believes that the United States should tackle the obesity epidemic with the same determination that it showed in combating the spread of swine flu.

Most weight-loss programs stress that extra weight is a serious health problem. They claim that being overweight can increase a person’s chances of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, a heart condition, and some forms of cancer. Therefore, the experts encourage health-conscious individuals to calculate their ideal weight and work toward achieving it. This, they say, will improve physical well-being.³⁸

The National Institute of Health (NIH) gathered a panel of researchers who specialized in obesity, nutrition, health, and exercise. The purpose of the conference was to find out whether dieting worked and whether it was healthy and safe. What they

³⁶ Ibid. 118.

³⁷ Shawna Vogel, *The Skinny on Fat: Our Obsession with Weight Control*, (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1999).

³⁸ Michele I. Drohan, *Weight-Loss Programs: Weighing the Risks and Realities*, (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 1998), 24.

discovered was that losing weight by dieting alone did not automatically make a person healthier.³⁹

With the multitude of restaurants, cookbooks, magazines, and television shows devoted to cooking, there is little wonder that today's youth are struggling with obesity and a lack of motivation, both of which can lead to self-esteem issues. This challenge must be met with the assistance of church leadership instructing youth to exercise more and practice good eating habits.

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Prov. 22:6

The scripture above offers a summary analysis of the theory put forth by Fred Pescatore in his book, *Feed Your Kids Wells: How to Help Your Child Lose Weight and Get Healthy*. In a nutshell, Pescatore contends that, when it comes to proper nutrition, modern parents behave as if no connection existed between childhood habits and the adults their children become. In other words, eating habits established early in life can doom a child to life-long struggles against obesity.⁴⁰

As parents, people are generally aware that the habits, values, and disciplines they instill in children that will serve them throughout their lives," he wrote "Yet, oddly enough people cling to the misguided notion that in terms of their eating habits, children

³⁹ Ibid. 24.

⁴⁰ Fred Pescatore, *Feed Your Kids Wells: How to Help Your Child Lose Weight and Get Healthy*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 14.

are a species apart from the rest of the human race, that commonsense rules and well-established laws of cause and effect do not apply.”⁴¹

He further states:

There is a maxim that states, “Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with him afterwards.” The seeds of what become one’s personalities—likes, dislikes, and even eating habits—are sown early. Show me the food intake of a child, and I will show you the dietary and health problems that child will have as an adult.⁴²

In their book *The China Study*, authors Campbell and Campbell wrote that societal struggle with weight are hard to miss these days. “Open a newspaper or magazine, or turn on the radio or TV—you know that America has a weight problem,” they wrote. “In fact, two out of three adult Americans are overweight, and one-third of the adult population is obese. Not only are these numbers high, but the rate at which they have been rising is ominous.”⁴³

About 15 percent of America’s youth ages six to nineteen are overweight, the authors wrote. Another 15 percent are at risk of becoming overweight.⁴⁴

The psychological toll of obesity, the authors said, can be enormous:

Overweight children face a wide range of psychological and social challenges. As you know, children have a knack for being open and blunt; sometimes the playground can be a merciless place. Overweight children find it more difficult to make friends and are often thought of as lazy and sloppy. They are more likely

⁴¹ Ibid. 14.

⁴² Ibid, 14.

⁴³ T. Colin Campbell and Thomas M. Campbell II, *The China Study; Starting Implications for Diet, Weight Loss and Long-Term Health*, (Dallas, Texas: Benbella Books, 2006), xx.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

to have behavioral and learning difficulties, and the low self-esteem likely to be formed during adolescence can last forever.⁴⁵

Campbell and Campbell also noted that young people who are overweight also are highly likely to face a host of medical problems—elevated cholesterol levels, which can be a predictor of chronic diseases; glucose intolerance and, consequently, diabetes (Type 2 diabetes, formerly seen only in adults, is skyrocketing among adolescents.); elevated blood pressure is nine times more likely to occur among obese children; sleep apnea, which can cause neuro-cognitive problems, is found in one in ten obese children; a wide variety of bone problems is more common among obese kids; and, most important, an obese young person is much more likely to be an obese adult, greatly increasing the likelihood of lifelong health problems.⁴⁶

A 2005 article in “Harvard Public Health Now” had this to say: “Americans know that as a society they have an obesity problem. Scientific reports and news media frequently describe the seemingly ever-expanding waistlines of the public. What may be less generally known is that minority populations are at particular risk for being overweight—and for the subsequent health problems associated with carrying around extra pounds.”⁴⁷

In the United States, more than 6 percent of the populations age twenty or older are overweight, and 33 percent of adults are obese, the magazine stated. Since 1991, the prevalence of obesity among adults has increased by more than 75 percent. And

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 137.

⁴⁷ Internet, Harvard Public Health Now, “Obesity: When Minority Groups Face Majority of Risks,” <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/now/jul22/>, (Accessed on July 22, 2005).

according to a national study, the prevalence of overweight rose by more than 120 percent among African Americans and Mexican Americans, compared to 50 percent among whites.⁴⁸

According to Shiriki Kumanyika, associate dean for health promotion and disease prevention at the University of Pennsylvania School Of Medicine, history may be as important as randomized trials in fashioning an effective public health policy to address childhood weight issues.⁴⁹ “Solutions for the obesity epidemic can be found in the same effective combination of personal behavior and social transformation responsible for past major public health achievements, such as discouraging tobacco use, encouraging vaccination, and mandating motor vehicle safety,” Kumanyika said.⁵⁰

A specific risk factor seen in African American children was the frequent use of sweets and sugar-sweetened drinks, which increased the odds of obesity nearly three-fold. In Caucasian children, the odds of obesity increased more than two-fold as a result of frequent consumption of snacks with a high fat content. In Hispanic children, specific risk factors included physical inactivity and frequent consumption of multiple servings of fruit, which increased the odds of obesity approximately two-fold and 68 percent, respectively. Although eating more fruit is usually considered a healthy behavior, excessive fruit consumption appears to increase the likelihood of obesity among Hispanic children.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Health Education Journal, 67(2), 121 – 133.

The rapid increase in childhood obesity has led to growing concern over the diets and lifestyle of American children. Increased fruit and vegetables as well as decreased fat and sugar consumption significantly reduce obesity in parents and their children. Increased physical activity in children is associated with a significant decrease in weight and body fat percentage. It has been suggested that television viewing, as part of a sedentary lifestyle, is one of the most easily modifiable risk factors associated with obesity among children. Reducing television, videotape, and videogame usage has been shown to be a promising population-based approach to prevent childhood obesity.⁵²

Several studies have reported an increase in childhood obesity, as well as the higher rates of obesity in Hispanic and African American children. However, limited information is available regarding race-specific lifestyle risk factors in children and adolescents. Identification of these risk factors is essential in order to design better targeted approaches to prevent obesity in children and consequently in adults. These studies observe specific risk factor associated with obesity in African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian children.⁵³ For this project, however, the author is concerned with African American youth.

From a historical perspective, the Bible says little concerning youth obesity. In recent decades, as changing notions of physical attractiveness and desirability required that women, and to a somewhat lesser extent, men, be trim and thin, gluttony has become less appealing. Most recently, the public's fixation on health and its quasi-obscene

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

fascination with illness and death, and it's impossible hope that diet and exercise will lead to immortality, have demonized eating in general and overeating in particular. Health consciousness and a culture fixated on death have transformed gluttony from a sin that leads to other sins into an illness that leads to other illnesses.⁵⁴

Few people seriously consider the idea that eating too much or enjoying one's food to be a crime against God, a profound moral failure for which the penalty is a prompt dispatched to hell. It is doubtful that even the most devoutly religious are likely to confess and seek absolution for looking forward to breakfast, or having taken pleasure in the delights of last night's dinner.⁵⁵

However, throughout the history of biblical examples, God established a dietary ethic of general restraint extending to all foods. The people of Israel fasted on manna in the wilderness while longing for the fleshpots of Egypt. They thirsted at Rephidim before defeating the Amalekites in battle. Moses fasted twice on the mountain where he received the two sets of commandments, each time for forty days.⁵⁶ Hannah fasted repeatedly, the Lord opened her womb and she gave birth to Samuel.⁵⁷ David hid in the desert when fleeing Saul, with the words of Psalm 63 attributed to him there: "My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Prose, *Gluttony*, xx.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁶

⁵⁷ Grumett, *Theology on the Menu*, xx.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Following Ahab's accession to the throne of Israel, Elijah withdrew to a desert ravine where ravens brought him food and he drank water from a brook. King Hezekiah vested in sackcloth, a sign of fasting, after which the Lord struck down the enemy army of Assyria. Daniel and his companions subsisted on vegetables and water while residing in the court of King Nabuchadnezzar of Babylon. As a result, they 'looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food' and were rewarded with knowledge and prophetic insight.⁵⁹

Jesus himself, according to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, inaugurated his ministry by undergoing forty days of testing by Satan in the desert, then resisted the temptation to turn stones into bread. Had he succumbed to this temptation, he would have demonstrated his divine Sonship as well as assuaged his desperate hunger. Anna fasted in the Temple, where she encountered the child Jesus and prophesied about his role in Jerusalem's redemption.⁶⁰ John the Baptist inhabited the wilderness and ate simple foods, usually identified as locusts and wild honey. Paul endured several fasts for the sake of the Gospel.⁶¹

Biblical Foundations

The Biblical Foundation section of this paper will provide detailed exegesis of the Old Testament text of Daniel 1:12-15

Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.⁶²

This paper will look at the social, economic, cultural, grammatical, theological, and historical aspects of these texts. This is important because it provides a biblical understanding of the doctoral project entitled “Combating Youth Obesity within the African American Church.”

From the book of Daniel there is an historical account of the faithful Jews who lived in captivity and to show how God is in control of heaven and earth, directing the forces of nature, the destiny of nations, and the care of his people.⁶³ Although in captivity, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego still practiced their culture norm in relation to what they ate and believed. Were the choices of these boys a matter of sociopolitical significance or an ideological choice? Because of the choices they made, the results they received from God were prominent positions within the Babylonian government.

Recent attention to the stories in Daniel 1-6 has also emphasized their literary character as stories that recommend a “lifestyle for the Diaspora.” Most literary analysis of these stories, however, has tended to overlook their potent sociopolitical power as stories of resistance to cultural and spiritual assimilation of a minority by a dominant

⁶² Daniel 1:12-15

⁶³ Life Application Study Bible, KJV

foreign power. From this perspective, these stories take on a more ominous shade than from the perspective of purely folkloristic analysis.⁶⁴

Reading Daniel in some contexts raises disturbing questions. How can a book meant to encourage the faith of a politically subordinated people be made meaningful for those in a dominant culture, such as European Americans, European Canadians, or European Australians? In short, do we read Daniel as modern Babylonians, Persians and Greeks, or as their captive people?⁶⁵

The book of Daniel gives examples how today's culture are to resist the fast food industry. The food industry ideology of providing the concept of food can be misleading and used to manipulate people in thinking they are eating healthier meals. The philosophy of Daniel and his companion to resist the King's offer would have subject their allegiance to God, thus causing the Hebrews boys to cave in to a social political establishment agenda. This philosophy of Daniel and the others was well grounded in the many years of culture teaching and commitment to God.

The texts suggest that Daniel offer a challenge to the overseer Mishaël. The text also suggested that Daniel was willing to meet this challenge with the confidence that the outcome would be favorable. The offer to resist participating in the king's food meant the refusals to conform to the social pressure. The actions of Daniel in chapter 1 is what author Donald Cowan writes in his book; *Daniel: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries*. "The story deals with those who believe and are committed to God yet

⁶⁴ The New Interpreter's Bible, *A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, xxxx), 20.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 34.

find themselves in jeopardy because of faithfulness to their religion but are delivered from the danger that threatens them.”⁶⁶

Youth obesity in today’s society may be a form of youth conforming with the practice of over indulgence of food and the lack of resisted not to participate because of convenience and will power or the lack their of. Daniel offers a solution to youth to resist the temptation of over eating and poor dieting by practicing the power of resistant. Daniel confidence not to participate in food that was to defied the body (v. 8) against God (the body being the temple of God); however, the food may have been offer up to the gods of the Babylonian people.

This researcher agrees with author Gowan, that there appears to be no problem with Daniel and his companion with other requirement of King Nebuchadnezzar such as the giving of differ names; it appears food was what got the attention. Gowan writes, “There is no indication of uneasiness about being given foreign names, about serving the king who had conquered their land, or even about becoming experts in the lore of Babylon, which would inevitably be infused with the beliefs of the local religion.”⁶⁷

The decision to resist eating the King’s food and wine for ten days spoke of the confidence and commitment that Daniel and the others had in their God, and not necessarily because God would protect and deliver them from any consequence because of their actions or decisions. This researcher believes the decision was due to their faith. God had been proven and tested before, and the young men believed God had the power

⁶⁶ Donald E. Gowan, *Daniel: Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 25.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 45.

to save them without knowing what may happen. The texts concluded that after the trail period, Daniel and the others develop better appearance, became better thinkers and intellectually superior relative to the young Babylonian men in the Kings' court.

Author Uriah Smith writes in his book, *"Daniel and the Revelation"*, "that Daniel requested pulse and water for himself and his three companions".⁶⁸ The word pulse is associated with vegetable food. Experts suggest that youth and adults alike should partake of the recommended 8 glasses of water on a daily use. Water has been said to help in the appearance of maintaining clear skins. The experts also suggest that youth and adults eat five serving of fruits and vegetables for daily consumption.

Smith continues to write that, "Pulse is a vegetable food of the leguminous kind, like peas, beans, etc."⁶⁹ The texts however states that Daniel request was for 10 days (v. 12). This is such a short request and one is left wondering what the results would be like. Smith writes, "A ten days trial of this diet resulting favorably, they were permitted to continue it during the whole course of their training (3 years) (v.5) for the duties of the palace."⁷⁰

This researcher is in agreement with Smith, that Daniel and his companion's results were not due just to the ten days trail. Smith writes, "Their increase in flesh and improvement in countenance which took place during these ten days can hardly be

⁶⁸ Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: The Response of History to the Voice of Prophecy*, (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1907), 31.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

attributed to the natural result of the dieting along; for it would hardly produce such marked effects in so short a time.”⁷¹

However, this researcher is convinced that these results were due to the interference (Divine intervention) of a God who promised to take care of God’s own evening in captivity. The texts, however, bears witness to the fact that Daniel and his companion’s appearance, skills, and knowledge were greatly improve and well documented and notice compared to the children that did eat the king’s portion of meat and wine (v. 20).

Every day people are overwhelmed with information concerning diseases, illnesses, child welfare, family fitness, and other health conditions. With President Obama attempting to secure major health care reform, and with all of the obsessive insults, lies, deceptions, and name calling, one is left to wonder if any Americans will receive the rights of total quality care. This researcher believes if today’s youth opts out of conformities’. That is, to make the hard choices and statements not to participate in the concept or philosophy of the fast food industry, then the restaurant will start to give their customer better food choices.

An appreciation of the story in the book of Daniel requires that one keeps in mind the prominence of food as a symbol of privilege and wealth and foreign overindulgence. Note that the first chapter of Daniel illustrates “the custom in ancient royal courts of introducing important prisoners to the national diet.”⁷² “But if modern readers are alerted

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² The New Interpreter’s Bible, *A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, (Abingdon Press, Nashville, xxxx), 40.

to the significance of food in the context of post-exilic conditions, Daniel 1 takes on added significance.”⁷³

Throughout biblical history, control of food, especially large amounts of it, is symbolic of power. This can best be summarized in a discussion of feasting and the taxation of foodstuffs (in-kind taxation). This discussion obviously anticipates some of the symbolism of Belshazzar’s feast in Chapter 5 as well.⁷⁴ Staying true to their culture, Daniel and the others were taking on a greater and higher commitment that God would stand by God’s words and protect the faithful.

This researcher however, is not so sure that the ten days would have made Daniel and the others more skilled and more intelligent, because the texts indicated (v. 4 and v. 17), that these young men were well favored, skillful in all wisdom, and knowledgeable. Daniel was also able to do dreams and interpretation of these dreams. Gowan writes, “These were talented young men from the beginning (v. 4). Was it because of their decision to remain faithful to a principle of their religion they believed to be beyond compromise that God rewarded them with even greater gifts (v. 17)?”⁷⁵

Notice here that the texts continued to display how Daniel and his companions increase in knowledge and wisdom (v. 4, v.17) as a results of not sub coming to conformities. The texts indicate that these young men were young, so youth of today can use their examples as a means of resisting the temptation to continued practice bad dieting. Youth learn better and are able to comprehend understanding at an early age. So

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Gowan, *Daniel*, 47.

talented, skilled, and develop in their early years, youth are at their prime to display the array of abilities to meet the challenges and therefore able to offer their best contribution to society.

The texts (v. 15) continued to show and speak to youth of today, not to compromise their health by participating in dieting that will lead to obesity. Youth should invest in the Temple of God for the long term return on investment and therefore afford a quality of life. This researcher understanding of the texts is when youth practice commitment and obedience to God, the results is an increase in the abundant of wisdom, bright minds in knowledge, and the abilities to perform high visible positions and yielded great contribution to society.

The setting and results of Daniel 1: 12 – 15 were an accomplishment to the young men faithfulness. C. L. Seow writes in his book, *Daniel*, “There is a modern ring to the story in verses 3 – 8. The triumphant imperialist government offers scholarships to the brightest and the best among the vanquished.”⁷⁶ The text appears to give some credence to King Nebuchadnezzar’s thinking that the brightest and best minds would be a benefit to his administration (v. 4). Seow points out in his writing that, “This act is clearly not one of pure generosity, for the scholarships are reserved for those who are most likely to benefit the government directly.”⁷⁷

Seow continue to write that, “The opportunity would be given only to the elite, specifically, young men who are physically in the best condition and who are already

⁷⁶ Seow, *Daniel*, 23.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

intellectually equipped to benefit the government---“to serve in the king’s palace” (v. 4).⁷⁸

This researcher understanding is that youth should make their commitment and allegiance to serve God, even if they are living in a society that place great emphases on convenience. It is a temptation to give in to the pressure of the food industry for quick fix when it comes to practicing proper dieting. If today’s society are to offer up the best and brightest minds to the contribution of this world, then the investment in quality food is a must in helping youth accomplishing and overcoming defect.

Seow also writes, “These youngsters are to be “without physical defect,” the same condition required of those who are dedicated to God’s service as priests (Lev. 21:16 – 24) and of animals offered up to God as sacrifice (Lev. 22: 19 – 21). This researcher agrees that because of Daniel and the others not to participate in practices that may defile the body; they were rewarded through God’s grace and mercy (v. 20).

Seow writes, “The narrator never loses sight of the theological focus implicitly laid out at the beginning. The text immediately goes on to show that God made Daniel’s decision work (v. 9). The text says, literally, “God gave Daniel for grace and mercies before the chief warden” (v. 9).⁷⁹ This result is what the church should expect when educating youth to practice proper dieting and exercising.

This section also will include a detailed exegesis of the New Testament text of 1 Corinthians 3: 16 – 17. In the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul teaches that Christians must care for their bodies as the “temple of the Lord.” Nevertheless, if today’s youth fail to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 27.

care for their bodies properly, the result is long-term damage and ailments such as diabetes, heart problems, and poor health overall and the high cost of maintaining good health.

The cost of these issues will have a major economic impact on the lives of many youth in the future as adults; this will also affect the resources of the church financial in the way of tithing and offering. If one is to establish a long-term relationship with God the Father, one must commit to a healthy diet and communicate with God on a daily basis. For God to use one's body as a temple, one must practice a holistic and spiritual living.

The Bible states in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17:

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God temple is sacred, and you are that temple.⁸⁰

The Pneumatology (Spirit) of God, Paul suggests allows the Holy Spirit to live within us and that Jesus who is embodied through God lives in this temple (body) (1 Cor. 12:27). Youth cannot survive if the church doesn't develop as their focus to educate youth on the proper way of dieting and caring for God's temple. Youth survival is key for the continue service for God long term works.

The texts indicate if Christians are aware were God lives and that God lives within all of us (v. 16). Therefore, Christians and youth alike must at all times be vigilant with the care of their bodies and develop attitudinal changes to lives a life in the works of

⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, KJV.

God through the spirit. Youth attitudes and how youth view obesity could be a major consequence to the upkeep of the body being the temple of God.

Gary D. Badcock writes in his book, *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today*, “The idea that the church is the body of Christ is among the most familiar of all ecclesiological claims.”⁸¹ This researcher believes that both “The Temple of God”, and “The body of Christ”, is one in the same when it comes to serving God spiritually. If people are to serve God they must do so by spirit, because the texts inform us that God is spirit (v. 16).

Christian’s spiritual hands and feet’s are to be used in an attempt to assist individuals to prepare for the quality of life. If youth are overweight and combating obesity this will demised those parts of the body that assist in offering continue service to others’. The fact that diabetes, one of the results of obesity limits person’s ability to offer quality service to others (amputation), this is a results of destroying body parts (v. 17).

Paul informs us that God expects God’s people to take care of their bodies and present them to God for the service of God. A clean body represents a clean spirit, and thus one’s mind, thinking, and fitness can live up to the test of producing longevity to serve others for the work of God’s plan. The purpose of one’s body as the temple is to be used by God for the works of God.

Paul instructed Christians to think before they engaged in bad behavior. However, dangerous eating pattern and poor practice of good health care will destroy one’s body.

⁸¹ Gary D. Badcock, *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 66.

When food is consumed carelessly, health issues result and God's people are not able to perform the duties that God expect of them in service to all humankind.

“Paul refined the notion of the Corinthians being “God’s building” (3:9). “Paul reminded them that they were a special building—namely, God’s temple in which God’s spirit dwells. The idea of God dwelling among the people taps Ezekiel’s everlasting covenant of peace in which the Lord God pledges to put the divine sanctuary “among them forevermore” (Ezek 37:26).”⁸² “My dwelling place will be with them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people (37:27).”⁸³

Paul teaching (v. 17), however, tells Christians they must practice proper care of the temple of God. Church leadership will need to offer youth an attitudinal fix that will help in understanding how important proper caring assist in longevity of the quality of life. Leadership in the church must use as teachable moment that youth attitudes can make the difference in (obesity) protecting the body, so that it may last for the long haul.

“In Paul description of them as a temple (3:16-17), however, Paul sifts decidedly to plurals: Together, the Corinthian believers are God’s special building; they have become the dwelling place of God’s Spirit. But there is a warning and a declaration. The warning: If anyone ruins, corrupts, defiles, or destroys God’s temple, then God will ruin or destroy that person (v. 17). The works of each individual will be judged on the last day. Paul closes the passage with his declaration, the reason that proper temple, which they are, is holy, and that temple is not to be defiled (Daniel 1:8).”⁸⁴

⁸² New Interpreters Bible, Ezekiel 37:27.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

“A banquet suggests the celebration of a joyful occasion, such as the weaning of Isaac in Gen. 21:8, Pharaoh’s birthday in Gen. 40:22, and Samson’s wedding in Judges 14:10. Such feasts were to be occasions for rejoicing and were contrasted with occasions for mourning in Eccl. 7:2 and Jer. 16:8.”⁸⁵ “But it is clear that feasting is also a symbol of power. In 1 King 3:15, Solomon declares a joyous feast after his “conversation” with God. Job and his sons feast as a symbol of their good fortune (Job 1:4), and the “messianic banquet in Isaiah 25 carries this theme of celebration into eschatological expectation.” “The exiled King Jehoiachin “put aside his prison clothes.” Every day of King Jehoiachin’s life, he dined regularly in the king’s presence (2 King 25:29-30).”⁸⁶

The role of God, the Bible, the church, and past biblical history concerning the health of God’s people, especially children, youth, and young adults has little information available. The focus of this researcher is in the area of youth health. Experts have noted that childhood obesity is at an all-time high. If society does not take a more serious and active role concerning the health of young people, then society will pay a high cost for health care for years to come.

The texts indicate that God is careful where God reside. Although, God doesn’t expect to live in people’s body, the metaphor or imagery is used as a place where the Holy Spirit dwells. It appears that the text asked a question, for which, we are not aware about where God lives (v. 16). The body of Christ, Gary Badcock writes, “At one end of the theological spectrum, the usage is purely metaphorical: the church is Christ’s body in

⁸⁵ The New Interpreter’s Bible, 40.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 41.

the sense that Jesus himself, as the ascended Lord, needs us as his “hands” and “feet” to continue his mission in the world.”⁸⁷ Badcock continued to write, “Our relationship with Christ, in other words, is not merely a matter of supposition or of moral imitation, but of our sharing by God’s power in the eschatological events of salvation.”⁸⁸

“A key part of being empowered to take care of your health and the health of your loved ones is to understand your health care vocabulary. Knowing the basics can help you be more informed about your health status and how to talk with your doctors and other health care providers about the best way to manage your care.”⁸⁹ This researcher agrees good health care and spiritually supports healthy Christian living.

Craig Blomberg states in his book, *1 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary*, “If the temple imagery is implicit in the metaphor of building with costly stones and metal (vv. 9-15), Paul makes it explicit in verses 16-17. The church is not just any building; it is the most holy and valuable of edifices.”⁹⁰

According to Dr. Otis Moss, Jr., “Health disparities issues create preventable illnesses and death, this occurs at a cost of billions of dollars in resources that could be saving or investing in other necessities”.⁹¹ Dr. Moss zoned in on the universal health care

⁸⁷ Badcock, *The House Where God Lives*, 66.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 85.

⁸⁹ Greater Diversity News, “Health and Wellness, Mind and Body,” September 30, 2009.

⁹⁰ Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994), 75.

⁹¹ Otis Moss, Jr., “Health, Healing, and Wholeness, In A Nation with Tragic Disparities,” August 20, 2009.

debate, “that the cost of quality health care is less than the price of preventable diseases, epidemics, and disasters.”⁹²

Dr. Moss also indicated that in spite of these vitriolic forces, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was able to pass Social Security and the GI Bill of Rights. President Lyndon Johnson was able to enact Medicare. The great paradox is that many people who are now benefiting from both Social Security and Medicare are fighting with meanness, ugliness, and even hate speech to block national health care reform.⁹³

It appears people must go from here and they will get there somehow and there is a divine and paratactic Word from the Lord. This researcher understands the spirit of God will help steer the United States and the world in the direction of caring for the “least of these.” Jesus and biblical reference provide insight in these areas of concerns. The forces of misguided self-interest and mean-spirited hate speech cannot and should not be allowed to dilute national health care reform for the common good of all who needs coverage.

This researcher will continue to pursue areas of the past, present, and future, where concerns and implementation has occurred and from the professionals who may have addressed many of the health disparities and issues’. This is preventing young Christians and others from reaching their full potential of living life with fullness and wholeness.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Veronica E. Grimm writes, *From Feasting to Fasting, The Evolution of a sin: Attitudes to Food in late Antiquity*, “In attempting to examine and put in historical perspective attitudes to food and fasting expressed in the Acts of the Apostles, we are faced with even more problems than those discussed in the previous chapter.”⁹⁴

Grimm continues to write, “Fasting is mentioned, with prayer, as preparation for the ceremony of the ‘laying on of hands’ (13:2-3; 14:23). Fasting is also mentioned as part of the Jews’ conspiracy when bent upon murdering Paul (23:12).”⁹⁵ “Food as such, when mention in Acts, is generally regarded as beneficial and strengthening, as an accompaniment to the apostles’ preaching and to rejoicing. Fasting among Christians is noted only twice, and both times in the same ceremonial context.”⁹⁶

Dr. Lisa M. Hess asked a question: “What commonalities are shared between faithful medical practitioners and religious leaders in faith community and faith-based settings?” This question is at the heart of this paper and the research that will follow.

Dr. Hess writes in her introduction; Paradox and surprise face those who pursue deeper spiritual practice, theological wisdom, even a religious calling “into the ministry.” Many churches, denominations, and seminaries deepen the discipleship through which one relates to God or the sacred, as well as to traditions of people seeking a vibrant life of significance and service.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Vernika E. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting, The Evolution of a sin: Attitudes to Food in Late Antiquity*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 74.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Lisa M. Hess, *Artisanal Theology*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), XV.

The texts inform today's church and leadership, that the spirit of God cannot survive a corrupt mindset that leads to a destroyed temple (v. 17). Obese and overweight youth is an example how Christian's youth can corrupt and destroy God's temple. However, attitudes among youth and the church may be key in winning this battle to protect the temple of God for future use.

The concerns for the growth of the future church will hinge on the health of children, youth, and young adults. Leadership of today's church may have to instruct young Christians of tomorrow in preparing for good health, healing, and wholeness. African American churches must develop a spirit of sharing the wealth. This is a great suggestion in responding in love, courage, and healing as we move toward the goal of health care reform.

Dr. Moss said that Dr. Martin L. King's teachings are more relevant to this present hour than they were forty years ago. This will be evidenced going forward in our practices of eating and living healthier. Health care reform will help assist all Americans to become conscious of health and practice better eating habits in this battle with obesity.

“We are all caught in an inescapable network of Mutuality, tied together in a single garment of Destiny. What affects one directly affects all indirectly...Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”⁹⁸

As informed Christians, the church must keep a vigilant watch over the health of its children and the youth of the church along with the awareness of how to keep them fit for the journey while being committed to the teaching and care for our youth's future. One major concern with the rise of youth obesity is the lack of information and guidance.

⁹⁸ Moss, “Health, Healing, and Wholeness,” August 20, 2009.

The African American church must include health education and outreach to bring awareness to the communities.

A key marker of Christian monastic identity was abstinence from red meat. This was enshrined in the Rule of Benedict, compiled in the mid sixth century, which became the standard in communities in the Christian West. It instructed unequivocally: ‘Except the sick who are very weak, let all abstain entirely from the flesh of four-footed animals.’⁹⁹ Benedict of Nursia established a principle of moderation in monastic diet quite different from the extreme asceticism of most anchorites. Clear communities can be identified between this principle and classical traditions of dietary advice. Benedict envisaged a single daily meal at which “every table should have two cooked dishes, on account of individual infirmities, so that he, who perchance cannot eat of one, may make his meal of the other.” A third dish of fruit or vegetables could be included, if available, adding to the minimum of two choices normally available. The daily bread ration remained the same if supper was taken at a later hour, with the cellarer instructed to reserve one third of the ration for this later distribution.¹⁰⁰

Old Testament

Sharon Pace writes in her book, “Daniel”, “The opening scene of Daniel introduces the first test of faithfulness encountered by Jewish youth under Babylonian

⁹⁹ Grumett, *Theology on the Menu*, xx.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

captivity. The chapter begins with an interpretive reconstruction of Nebuchadnezzar's captures of Jerusalem, its temple treasures, and the exile of its people."¹⁰¹

The historical perspective of childhood obesity can be understood somewhat with the invitation from Isaiah 55:2:

Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Daniel and his companion (1: 12 – 15), set good examples for youth to follow and commit themselves to resist the ideological of the food industry. Youth should believe and trust that God can and will provide for their every need. With all that people work so hard and long for still does not satisfy their desires and fulfillment in this life, yet they continue in pursuit for that, which can never make us fully happy. With a society and a generation being brought up with supersized of McDonald order of number 4 or 8, youth do not understand the real health risk that may be associate with long term illness.

In Isaiah 61:1-2, the following words are written:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;¹⁰²

This is what Paul indicates as he informs Christians about not destroying the body of Christ in their pursuit of life pleasures, but to be free. Daniel and his companion practices determination not to defied the body and therefore used faith not to yield to the temptation of conformities'. The texts in Daniel (1: 12 – 15) indicate that the young men

¹⁰¹ Sharon Pace, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Daniel*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2008), 19.

¹⁰² The Holy Bible, King James Version, Sept. 2006.

were giving opportunities to succeed and develop their skills and talents although King Nebuchadnezzar's administration benefited greatly. Today's youth need to be aware that being overweight and obese may cause opportunities to be limited.

The texts (v. 17) concluded that Daniel continued in his skills and development by interpretation of dreams and that Daniel went on to serve in and during the administration of Cyrus around 539 BCE. The fact that Daniel continued for so long with wisdom and knowledge were attributed to God keeping God promises to favor Daniel and blessing him to have a successful career. Although in captivity, God powers are not subjective to being control by neither human power nor world dominance, Daniel expanded greatly with wisdom and understanding from God.

When one becomes educated and prepared by God to teach and preach the Good News (Is. 61:1), one develops and delivers better understanding for what is required by God for long and healthier living. Bread is a form of sustainer for life that will help enrich full and prosperous menthol for one having the power to do the will of God and meeting other expectations required by God. African American churches should step up their vigilant against youth obesity and promote a ministry within the congregation to assist youth with education in the fight against obesity.

The power to understand the wisdom that comes from God is to understand the promises of God. God has promised that the servant would "see his offspring".¹⁰³ There are times when the outcome of God promises is truly beyond comprehension. In fact, one

¹⁰³ Leander C. Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), xx.

suspects that the true nature of God's power and sovereignty are most on display when we have run out of cause to hope, when the way ahead is only dark.¹⁰⁴ God promises keep pressing their way into our consciousness. Then when the skies clear, what God shows us catches us off guard, so stunning is the display of divine richness.¹⁰⁵

The power of information and understanding that information will help toward freeing God's people to accept the "Good News" that surpasses all understanding that comes from God. That is also to learn best practices that will help develop better eating habits for both adults and youth that makes up our churches and their congregations.

New Testament

Paul offers the understanding with this project that churches and its leadership should educate membership, namely youth to practice caring for the Temple of God (v. 16). God dwells within Gods people; therefore, the people must practice a holistic living that will allow God to live with God people. If humankind is not aware how obesity can destroy the body, the challenge is for church to educate the congregation starting with the youth, they are the future.

From the beginning the religion of the descendants of the Africans who were brought to the Western world as slaves has been something less and something more than what is generally regarded as Christianity. Under the circumstances, it could not have been otherwise. The religious beliefs and rituals of a people are inevitably and

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 479.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

inseparably bound up with the material and psychological realities of their daily existence.¹⁰⁶

The religious inclinations of blacks in the United States, the West Indies, Central and South America today, almost five hundred years later, are largely predisposed to the beliefs and practices of the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the Christianity that developed among successive generations of the descendants of the first slaves brought to this part of the world is a different version of the Judeo-Christian tradition than that professed by the descendants of the slave masters,

The New Testament of Matthew 1:1, began with the birth of a new born child, and what could be consider a unhealthful location for a child to be born. Was there ever a concern for the well being of the child? Did the child's father and mother lack health care insurance? How would the child prenatal care be paid for? Would there be enough in the budget for proper child nutrition and meeting the ongoing demand for the upkeep of the child's care?

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost”¹⁰⁷

It is not the intention of this author to challenge anyone belief or disbelief of the circumstance of how the birth of Jesus came about, but more on how in time child care takes on different culture responsibility and how that culture changes over time. We find

¹⁰⁶ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 22.

¹⁰⁷ Matthew 1:1.

Mary and Joseph reroute to Bethlehem because of a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all should be taxed. After traveling for days the rough hill side and being pregnant, Mary gave birth to a child, not at UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University, UCLA or John Hopkins. Mary gave birth in a stable and we are not sure what the conditions were, but on today's terms that would have been unacceptable with the many concerns with children's health care.

The culture of today has taken on so many difficult challenges for today's parenting. Single parenting takes on a major involvement and commitment from person prepared to meet the challenges of rearing children and making sure their health doesn't develop any setbacks. The culture for which Mary lived in was less tolerant of single women having a child out of wedlock. In fact Mary's life would have ended in death and she would have been stoned to death and that would have been the end of the discussion.

The cost of health care at time prevents individuals from practicing good health care solutions. Healthcare of a child is a major financial under taking and one has to approach it with the right and best information available to make the best decision for their child's care. However, evidence from pastors and congregants suggests that many African American do not take health risks seriously or change their behaviors until they receive a doctor's warning or diagnosis of illness, when it is often too late to prevent disease.

“Culturally relevant education about how to make healthier food choices, use better cooking methods, and follow an exercise routine is essential. Such knowledge, coupled with pastoral advocacy, church fellowship and professional support, builds confidence that youth can succeed and be empower that will lead to better long-term

outcomes.”¹⁰⁸ We may have to face the daunting task of trying to undo the mindset of a society who will subject our youth to a segregated culture that will pass judgment because of their weight.

Today we live with an updated version of segregation. Many American, including evangelicals, believe that race barriers and their impact on class are in the past because we no longer live under Jim Crow legislation, with its enforcement of separate living quarters, as well as separate public bathrooms and drinking fountains, based on the color of one’s skin. Segregation is still a fact of life: though it is perhaps no longer based on enforced legal structures, it is based on the norms of consumer preference. Intentionally or not, many evangelical churches are guilty of setting up structures of church growth that foster segregation, such as appealing to consumer appetites and the like. We who belong to the evangelical Christian community need to eat crow – humble pie!¹⁰⁹ Moreover, we in the evangelical community need to change our appetites and eating habits: we need to leave the segregated table and its consumerist bacchanalia and gather at the table of repentance and reconciliation.¹¹⁰

“Further, the consideration of the Christian meal as a specifically liturgical act has had limiting consequences as well as positive ones. The recent development of new approaches from liturgical scholars does pave way for a more adequate understanding of

¹⁰⁸ Internet, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, Health, United States, 2002,” (Accessed)

¹⁰⁹ Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church*, (Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), xx.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Eucharistic meals, but necessitates moving beyond what might usually be called ‘liturgical’ texts and concerns.”¹¹¹

“Recent approaches to food and meals offer some important possibilities for a fuller account taking into consideration implicit meanings. These possibilities now need to be considered in terms of the foods and meals known to the ancient Gracco-Roman world, before considering the specific evidence for the variety of uses of food and drink in early Christian ritual meals. Further questions must thus be asked of the texts to consider the history of early Christianity as though people did indeed eat.”¹¹²

“Conduct at banquets could vary greatly. We have evidence of wild parties not only full of eating and drinking but replete with forms of entertainment such as dancing, intended to overcome the other senses as well. Satirists and writers of comedy for the stage favoured the banquet as a place where excess could be pilloried, especially where participants had other attributes not to the writer’s taste. On the other hand the association between the banquet and philosophy was proverbial.”¹¹³

Many meal elements were capable of expressing, and even creating, patterns of relationship among diners and of these foods is the most obvious. Quantity, quality, and variety of food and drink were indicators of many things: the wealth, taste, and generosity of the host and the self-indulgence of host and guests alike. We find indications both of conscious equality of portions, and thus again of the banquet as a sort of dietary

¹¹¹ Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), xx.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

democracy, but also of clear differences in quantity and quality of food that underscore different offices or status.

The former model seems to be associated with the older Greek ideal of the egalitarian city; portions of sacrificial meat might even be distributed by lot to make sure that justice was seen to be done. As in the more public aspects of the practice of democracy, this emphasis on equality might serve as much to define members of an elite over and against others, as to lessen distinctions between them; the ideology of equality could be a powerful tool in the hands of dominant power.¹¹⁴

Theological Foundations

Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. Prov. 23:20-21

Relational theology teaches us that we are what we eat. As Americans, we live in a nation of plenty. Yet this obvious blessing has resulted in a widening health epidemic that threatens to overwhelm the nation's health care system and diminish the effectiveness of the Christian Church.

Indeed, this researcher proposes that obesity and its related effects are, in reality, an impediment to Christian service. This proposition becomes obvious when one considers that overeating and sedentary lifestyles lead to obesity and that obesity leads to poor health. Poor health then impacts the quality of life, therefore impeding one's works and decreasing one's ability to serve God, the church, and others.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

The story of Daniel illustrates how, when one establishes a relationship with God, the believer pledges his or her total being to the good works that God would have us undertake. In the true sense, it is not about being all to one's self, but being a united people of God—each member committed to the greater body and equipped for the many works that lies ahead. Indeed, there is accountability to God that we will practice good health and serve God and others with a greater awareness of our stewardship to God's will. God has kept God's end of the relationship; God now expect that we will to keep our part of the bargain by building a lasting relationship for the common good of all mankind.

All across the United States, researchers, scientists, and academics are exploring methods to address the problem of obesity and its related health effects. In some locations, they are working closely with the black church. In other instances, similar efforts are being led by black clergy within their own communities and congregations.

This section of the foundational paper will outline some of those models—especially those in the African American community—and lay a foundation for what this researcher believes can be an effective ministry to address the growing problem of obesity and the various health issues that often plague the black community.

While not all examples noted in this section deal directly with obesity, the examples cited nevertheless illustrate what can be accomplished when the Christian church involves itself in the holistic care of its members.

Anthony B. Pinn, author of *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, noted that a growing number of congregations already had begun to undertake this task.¹¹⁵ These efforts, he said, generally fit into three categories: (1) medical assistance, (2) information and education, and (3) prevention programs.

A select few churches, he said, “with major resources...have recognized the inadequacy of overcrowded emergency rooms in county hospitals and are seeking to remedy this through the construction of alternate hospitals.”¹¹⁶

Pinn noted in particular the Olivet Institutional Baptist Church of Cleveland, which is led by the Rev. Otis Moss Jr. In 1998, Olivet Institutional developed the Otis Moss, Jr. University Hospitals Medical Center in cooperation with University Hospital of Cleveland.¹¹⁷

“Whereas the medical treatment offered is in keeping with traditional practices, this hospital overtly promotes a link between the body and spirit,” Pinn wrote.¹¹⁸ The author quotes Pastor Moss as saying that there *is no true separation* between body and spirit. ““And when there’s an attempt to separate the two, something suffers.””¹¹⁹

Olivet Institutional is not alone in rethinking black health care through the creation of alternate sites of assistance.

¹¹⁵ Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 101.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Pinn also notes the East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC), a collective of fifty churches in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. The collective is led by the Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood.¹²⁰

Not only has EBC developed affordable housing; it also has built health care facilities in East Brooklyn. For example, St. Peter Claver provides medical treatment for the uninsured.¹²¹ To be sure, most churches—especially black churches—cannot afford such expensive approaches to health care, yet St. Peter Claver has found a way. In order to reduce overhead, it staffs the facility, in part, with church members who are medical professionals, Pinn wrote.¹²² Many of the services are also coordinated with communities and churches through health fairs, and job fairs.

Churches that strive to enhance the quality of health care for their members embrace a variety of approaches to get the word out. In some cases, Pinn wrote, announcements are posted weekly in church bulletins. Others partner with outside groups and organizations to refer members to available health care services.¹²³

Perhaps one of the most closely watched efforts to address obesity in the African American community was the 2004 Genesis Health Project, which was launched by Syracuse University. Working closely with black churches, the goal was to create a “community-driven, culturally competent intervention to reduce obesity and promote

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

healthy lifestyles among African Americans in Syracuse, New York.”¹²⁴ The program targeted low-income families in the black church to help them improve their eating and exercise habits. The longer-term goal was to help the families maintain these healthy practices throughout a lifetime.

The researchers knew that if the pilot program was to succeed, it would require commitment from African American preachers as well as input from the families the program was designed to help. Ministers from six black churches were recruited, and a Pastors’ Health Council was formed to provide leadership.¹²⁵

“Pastor involvement and role modeling were deemed crucial...,” the researchers wrote.¹²⁶

In early 2005, the researcher began their work in earnest. The program focused on three key strategies: decreased calorie intake, physical exercise and behavior modification. A 12-week time frame was chosen because previous research indicates that would take about three months for participants to establish new habits.¹²⁷

Here is how researchers described the program:

The free program, held at one of the churches, ran for 12 consecutive Saturdays from May to August. Each 3-hour session began with a “Share ‘n’ Praise” where participants talked about successes and challenges regarding healthy eating and exercise during the week. A 1.5-hour fitness class followed, which included the instructor’s presentation, discussion, questions and feedback from participants as well as aerobic exercise. The last half hour

¹²⁴ Luvenia W. Cowart, et al., Association of Black Nursing Faculty (ABNF) Journal, Winter 2010, 4.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 5.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 6.

alternated between nutrition education and health information/motivation.¹²⁸

At the first session, fifty-five people from six churches registered. The sessions provided hands-on learning in an informal setting. The format was interactive and included presentations, group dialogue, storytelling, questions, and cooking demonstrations. Each was asked to sign an “exercise behavior contract.” Participants also were asked to reduce frying, eat more fresh vegetables and whole grains, and curtail certain foods. High-sugar fruit juices and sodas were especially discouraged.

Six nutrition clinics focused on healthy eating. Topics included:¹²⁹

1. Think Your Drink—select healthy drinks to limit sugar and reduce calories.
2. The Power of Produce—select, prepare, and enjoy more fruits and vegetables.
3. Portion Distortion—control portion sizes to maintain a healthy weight.
4. Read Food Labels—note nutritional content to avoid high fat, sugar, and salt.
5. Go for the Grain—choose whole grains to gain the benefits of fiber and nutrients.
6. Sample New Foods—introduce healthy new items into your family’s diet.
7. Adjust Ethnic Recipes—keep the taste but decrease calories, fat, and sodium.
8. Review My Pyramid—learn about food variety and daily nutritional requirements.
9. Putting it all together—review menus and make healthy choices when eating out.

At the end of the twelve-week period, post-pilot results were “mostly positives outcomes,” the researchers reported. The results included:¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

- A “clear shift” to healthier food choices—less dairy and more fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains.
- Healthier cooking methods were “clearly evident.” Fewer post-pilot respondents reported frying beef, pork, chicken, or fish.
- Menus at church functions became healthier. Chicken was baked rather than fried; green salads more often replaced potato salad and healthier beverages were offered instead of soda.
- Results of the exercise program were more mixed. A high percentage of post-pilot respondents reported doing no exercise one month after the pilot ended.
- A large percentage of respondents also were unwilling to give up their sugary fruit drinks, although soda consumption did decline.

Four months after the program ended, participants were given a follow-up survey. Sixteen of nineteen (84 percent) said they still practiced better dietary habits. Though fewer than 25 percent said they exercised before the pilot, 48 percent reported exercising at least twice a week four months post-test. A majority reported weight loss (57 percent), more loosely fitting clothing (81 percent), and a better quality of life (71 percent).¹³¹

Increasingly, organizations seeking to reduce obesity and promote healthy lifestyles in the African American community are recognizing the importance of working with the black church. Indeed, a 2007 study by Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life found that in the United States, which is “generally considered a highly religious nation, African-Americans are markedly more religious on a variety of

¹³¹ Ibid. 9.

measures than the U.S. population as a whole, including level of affiliation with a religion, attendance at religious services, frequency of prayer and religion's importance in life.”¹³²

Compared with other racial and ethnic groups, African-Americans are among the most likely to report a formal religious affiliation, with fully 87% of African-Americans describing themselves as belonging to one religious group or another... The Landscape Survey also finds that nearly eight-in-ten African-Americans (79%) say religion is very important in their lives, compared with 56% among all U.S. adults... More than half of African-Americans (53%) report attending religious services at least once a week, more than three-in-four (76%) say they pray on at least a daily basis and nearly nine-in-ten (88%) indicate they are absolutely certain that God exists. On each of these measures, African-Americans stand out as the most religiously committed racial or ethnic group in the nation.¹³³

Given the propensity of African Americans—especially African American women—to attend a worship service, there should be little doubt that the black church sits in an enviable position to affect change in their communities, even changes that can lead to better improved health for millions.

That same Pew study found that among African Americans, women were generally more likely to attend church than men. Only 9 percent of African American women said they were unaffiliated with any religion, compared with 16 percent of African American males.

African-American women also stand out for their high level of religious commitment. More than eight-in-ten black women (84%) say religion is very important to them, and roughly six-in-ten (59%) say they attend religious services at least once a week. No

¹³² Internet, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “A Religious Portrait of African Americans,” <http://pewforum.org/A-Religious-Portrait-of-African-Americans.aspx>, (Accessed Sept. 3, 2011).

¹³³ Ibid.

group of men or women from any other racial or ethnic background exhibits comparably high levels of religious observance.¹³⁴

As noted previously by this researcher, African American women also lead the nation in their rate of obesity.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, a local nonprofit organization, working with the Mecklenburg County Health Department, launched a program in the summer of 2011 to bring fresh produce markets to local black churches. Unlike most other produce stands in the city, those operating in conjunction with the Black Women's Health Network agreed to accept benefit cards for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP.¹³⁵

The pilot program was tested at six Charlotte churches. Denise Hairston, executive director of the Black Women's Health Network, had taught healthy lifestyle classes in Mecklenburg for about three years. She was quoted as saying that women in those classes often complained about the lack of fresh food in their neighborhood stores, and when they could find it, the quality often was poor.¹³⁶

Hairston estimated that more than 10,000 people lived within walking distance of the churches that agreed to host the Farm to Family markets. In addition to walk-up traffic, she hoped the markets would attract church members as well.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Karen Sullivan, The Charlotte Observer, http://www.qcitymetro.com/faith/articles/nonprofit_helps_churches_host_produce_markets070241710.cfm (Accessed on Sept. 10, 2011).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Three weeks into the project, organizers reported “mixed success.”¹³⁷ Hairston said the Women’s Health Network would evaluate each location with plans to continue serving the busiest two or three.

Ironically, obesity—once considered an outward indication of wealth and divine blessing—in the United States has been disproportionately confined to individuals and families that earn the lowest levels of income, O. C. Edwards Jr. noted in the book *How It All Began: Origins of the Christian Church*.¹³⁸

“Poor people are often overweight,” he said, “because cheap foods are fattening...the Weight Watcher’s diet is a good bit more expensive than many of the delicious things that made you need it. Not everyone can afford to be slim.”¹³⁹

In a pilot program to address this disparity, researchers at Tulane University are working with the corner stores in three New Orleans neighborhoods to offer residents more nutritious groceries. The goal of this intervention is to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables and reduce the consumption of high-calorie snack foods.¹⁴⁰

The Tulane researchers noted that in many of the city’s African American communities, residents often shop at corner stores that had few fresh fruits and vegetables and a large number of high-calorie snacks. The team is working with store owners to reduce the amount of shelf space devoted to selling unhealthy snacks and increase the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ O. C. Edwards Jr., *How It All Began: Origins of the Christian Church*, (New York: New Seabury Press, 1973), 43.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Internet, Centers For Disease Control and Prevention, <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/prereasearchprojects/Projects/ProjectDescription.aspx>, (Accessed Sept. 18, 2011).

amount devoted to fresh fruits and vegetables. Promotion of healthy foods within the store is encouraged, while advertisements for high-calorie snacks are discouraged. Owners at participating stores receive financial incentives to encourage their participation.

The researchers offer advice on selection of fruits and vegetables and how to keep perishable items from spoiling, such as the use of a refrigerated display to showcase healthy foods. They may also get tips on the preparation of foods made on site, such as sandwiches or hot plates.

Researchers will send letters to residences in the intervention neighborhoods to make them aware of the study. Interviewers will visit randomly selected homes before and after the intervention to survey the residents and take weight and height measurements to determine if changes in corner store options affect food purchases, food consumption, and body mass index. These data will be compared with data collected from residents in comparable neighborhoods that do not receive the intervention.¹⁴¹

The pilot program, which focuses on African Americans, began in 2010 and will continue through 2014.

To address the issue of inactivity, a separate pilot program is being conducted among African Americans in Sumter County, South Carolina, where researchers from the University of South Carolina are seeking to encourage rural residents in underserved communities to increase the amount of time they spend walking.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Internet, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/prcresearchprojects/Projects/ProjectDescription.aspx>, (Accessed September 7, 2011).

Researchers were holding focus groups with 100 residents to get their advice on the best way to introduce walking programs in their neighborhoods. The researchers also were seeking to recruit 325 people from five predominantly African American communities to join “walking programs.” Participants are paired with a fellow recruit, or walking buddy, to motivate each other to reach a goal of 150 minutes of exercise per week by the end of the twelve-month program. Participants’ body mass index, waist circumference, blood pressure, and flexibility, would be measured when they entered the program then again after six and twelve months. Researchers also were encouraging participants to get their friends and family members to join them in the walking programs.¹⁴³

The goal of the program was to improve participants’ long-term attitudes about physical activity. Once the research had ended, participants would be surveyed to find out if they still walked regularly for exercise.¹⁴⁴

The pilot program was scheduled to be concluded in 2014.

Important though programs are, ministers of the gospel must never forget the ultimate reason why they must be concerned about the health of their congregants—it is their calling by a loving God that cares about God’s total creation. As much as anything, obesity carries a stigma that has the potential to isolate overweight individuals from the love and compassion of their fellow humans. At worst, it can adversely impact health, diminishing an individual’s physical ability to serve God and fellow humans.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

Indeed, Edwards contended that victims of obesity are “entitled to the concerns of Christian people.”¹⁴⁵

“When one considers the incidence of obesity, real or imagined, it is amazing that there has been so little theological reflection on the subject,” he wrote. “People actually worry more about it than they do about all of the issues of public morality that theologians think they should be interested in.”¹⁴⁶

To illustrate his point, Edwards noted the large amounts of space in bookstores “devoted to one scheme or another for weight reduction:”

...you have the “drinking man’s diet” and the tee-totalism of Weight Watchers; low calories, low carbohydrates, low cholesterol; “doctor’s diets” and “natural” or “organic” methods to lose weight; the psychological approach of a “formerly fat psychiatrist” and purely objective calorie counter; crash diets and permanent changes of eating habits. There have even been suggestions—some facetious but other serious—that the way to weight loss is through sexual indulgence. Now the reason that all those books are being publishes is that someone will buy them and the reason that someone will buy them is that they are ashamed of being overweight.¹⁴⁷

Edwards said the shame associated with obesity can rob individuals of self-esteem and hamper their relationships with others:

...fat people are often regarded by others and come to regard themselves as non-people. Their size becomes the most important fact of their existence. Like other groups that are discriminated against, they are no longer seen to be created by God the Father in his own image, redeemed by God the Son, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit for their sanctification. They do not receive the reverence that all human beings are entitled to.

¹⁴⁵ Edwards, *How It All Began*, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

This project took place at Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church and followed the method for Action Research. Action Research is a set of self-consciously collaborative and democratic strategies for generating knowledge and designing action in which trained experts in social and other forms of research and local stakeholders work together.¹ The research focus is chosen collaboratively among the local stakeholders and the action researchers, and the relationships among the participants are organized as joint learning processes.² A four part definition of research is given: “Research is a (1) systematic search for (2) adequate information to reach (3) objective knowledge of a (4) specific topic.”³

1. Systematic search. This requires effort. It does not just happen. A researcher must develop and use a clear method and a logical system. Research is not easy; it requires time, energy, thought, and effort.
2. Adequate information. Research does not look for someone’s ideas about matters touching on the problem; it seeks precise answers to the questions

¹ Davydd J. Greenwood & Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 1.

² Ibid.

³ Nancy J. Vyhmeister, *Quality: Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 1.

being asked. The information presented must be from authoritative sources, speak to the problem, and be duly documented.

3. Objective knowledge. In order to reach objective knowledge, you must have prior knowledge of the topic. To this prior knowledge you will add facts, not suppositions or possibilities. Research is done with the head and not the heart. Research looks at facts, not conjectures, nor even possibilities, much less long-cherished ideas.
4. Specific topic. It is impossible to do adequate research on a large topic. The research paper is not an encyclopedia. A specific, clearly delineated problem is the only one that can be solved.

Also consider with this Action Research project “is a social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community, or network (“stakeholders”) who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation. Action Research promotes broad participation in the research process and support action leading to a more just, sustainable, or satisfying situation for the stakeholders.”⁴

The method used for this project is qualitative. In qualitative studies, because of the inductive, evolving methodological design, inquirers may define few terms in the proposal. In a qualitative research plan, a writer may advance “tentative” definitions. For

⁴ Greenwood, *Introduction to Action Research*, 3.

example, in a qualitative case study, themes (or perspectives or dimensions) emerge through the data analysis.⁵

In a qualitative study, inquirers state research questions, not objectives (i.e., specific goals for the research) or hypotheses (I. e., predictions that involve variables and statistical tests). These research questions assume two forms: a central question and associated sub questions.⁶ The central question is a statement of the question being examined in the study in its most general form. The inquirer poses this question, consistent with the emerging methodology of qualitative research, as a general issue so as to not limit the inquiry⁷

Research questions and hypotheses narrow the purpose statement and become major signposts for readers of research. Qualitative researchers ask at least one central question and several sub questions. They begin the questions with words such as “how” or “what” and use exploratory verbs, such as “explore” or “describe.” They pose broad; general questions which allow the participants to explain their ideas. They also focus initially on one central phenomenon of interest.⁸

⁵ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 144.

⁶ Ibid, 105.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 116.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Working with students (African American youth) at church was challenging. It took some work to get the youth to open up, express their opinions, and offer feedback. A total of seventy youths participated in this project. The youth, however, came from diverse backgrounds and from a collection of military, education and civil service families. Some were not regular members of Lewis Chapel, but they participated in the survey and gave insightful information. There were questions asked relating to how they spent the day at school and what food they consumed throughout the day.

The project began with an explanation to the students about the nature of the project and why it was being considered at church. Most of the students were aware of obesity and the long-term effects it could have on them.

We asked the students a series of questions: How they preferred to have their food cook—fried, baked, or grilled? Or how many of them preferred eating a home-cooked meal as opposed to McDonald's? Some said they preferred the latter because they got to meet their friends and hang out after school. Classes met from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday evening during Bible study and were incorporated as part of their discussion to allow each student to participate. Participants were asked to give feedback on their daily activities and what they had to eat each day, starting with breakfast, lunch, and

dinner. Each student shared with the group his or her understanding of a healthy diet and how their attitudes must change in order to live a productive and empowering life.

Moreover, students generally implied that they are so busy that they didn't have or take the time to properly prepare meals. A number of students had parents who worked, and they were at an age where they could prepare food for themselves. If their parents did not take time to prepare the meals, they would opt in many cases to eat junk food. The group discussed how important it was to communicate with parents and each other and the importance of developing better attitudes when it came to their health and proper nutrition. Discussion also included ways of setting up a model to help them enforce this attitude change.

Collection of Data

The central question started with "how;" it used an open-ended verb "read;" it focused on a single concept in the study. The author suggested that students craft a concise, single question that needed to be answered in the study.¹ Classes started in October; opened with a prayer and song. The classes began with a focused scriptural text and the group looked at how this would apply to their everyday lives and decisions. The attempt was to ask questions that would get students to share if they had suggestions to help improve their overall diet and how they could incorporate a daily exercise program to help maintain better weight control.

The church youth had a wide range of eating habits at the start of the project, as shown in the pre-test survey. Some of the data collected from the survey questions consisted of what each youth had for breakfast, lunch, and dinner (today and yesterday).

¹ Ibid. 107.

At the start of the project youth were eating pancakes, turkey bacon, grits, sausage dogs, cereal, eggs, or nothing at all for breakfast. Their lunches consisted of ham and cheese sandwiches, peanut butter sandwiches, garden salads, fish, chicken, Doritos, cakes, cookies, hot dogs, and hamburgers.

The youths' dinner ranged from pizza, rice, Chinese food, fried chicken, green beans, mashed potatoes, salads, broccoli, and fries. Most of their drinks consisted of orange juice, water, milk, soda, apple juice, and Kool-Aid. This researcher noticed that few youth mentioned that they ate five fruits and vegetables per day. Youth attitudes concerning eating habits mirrored that of community and society. Therefore, churches and their congregations must become vigilant in protecting tomorrow's church and its future by teaching and practicing healthier lifestyles.

First Class

Class began on October 6, 2010 with a prayer and an open forum to discuss how obesity affects youth in church and schools. The students reflected on the texts taken from the book of Daniel 1:8-15. The class started discussing what the real reason was that Daniel and the others refused to eat at the king's table and were there reasons other than a culture commitment or a standard. The class felt that what they ate sometime did affect their looks and how they felt about themselves.

A number of students felt that eating at McDonald's or having pizza was no big deal. However, they understood that eating this way every day may cause many unhealthy issues, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or heart problems. Many of the students expressed that at school they eat fries for lunch every day and that this

caused their skin to break out due to the daily consumption of fries. When asked whether they preferred to eat fried or baked chicken, most said they preferred fried chicken over baked or grilled. A few of the students said that due to the fact that their parents eat healthier, this causes them to practice better eating habits.

The students were presented with a survey during this class consisting of twelve questions and opportunity to give feedback. The questions consisted of asking students about their looks, their concerns about what they eat, whether their happiness depended somewhat on how they viewed their beauty, and if obesity was an epidemic among youth in our society. Questions were asked about the statement “Our body is the temple of the Lord” (See Appendix A and B). The students offered a variety of responses: Our bodies are now ours; it belong to God and therefore we should not abuse it; one should be careful what one take into the body; take pride in how one looks; and learn to love yourself and develop better attitudes. The class ended with prayer.

Second Class

Class two was on October 13, 2010; we open with prayer. The class looked at Proverbs 23: 20-21. The passage dealt with the importance of exercising restraint over food and drink. The class discussed how one should exercise control over how much one eats. Maybe McDonald’s is not a good habit for everyday consumption and that youth should practice preparing meals more at home than out. The Proverb texts inform us that that we should not place ourselves in a position of overeating or overindulging to the point of gluttony. The class talked about overeating and even eating to the point of illness

or not being able to hold down what they had eaten. However, overindulgence can lead one to become lazy or drowses. Thus, youth become less coherence and not able to focus.

The class discussed physical fitness and how youth can incorporate some of these activities into their daily responsibilities. One suggestion was to start a “walking club,” where two or three youth could meet each day at a set time at school or church to promote healthier lifestyles and practice better eating habits. The class talked about activities such as aerobics, swimming, jogging, dancing, running, and walking. The youth felt that a daily commitment to any of these activities would require a promise to themselves as well as to one another. A handout was provided so that each student could give feedback about the activities to which they were willing to commit (See Appendix C). A physical activities survey was provided for the class. Eighty-one percent (81%) of the participants chose walking as their favor mode of exercising. However, 75 percent chose basketball, 69 percent running, 68 percent jogging, 56 percent football, and 50 percent aerobics. The class ended with prayer.

Third Class

Class three was held on October 20, 2010. As usual, the class began with prayer. The biblical texts for the evening came from Leviticus 11: 1-47. Some youth pointed out that they could not eat a pig (hog) and that they could not understand how anyone could bring himself to eat such a thing. Some in the group noted that their grandparents raised pig (hogs) as part of their farms and that it was a main part of their family upbringing. The class discussed how overeating or gluttony could lead to high blood pressure or how one could develop a stroke as a result of eating too much pork. The youth expressed

concerns and could not understand why God would create an animal and later forbid humans from eating of that animal. The class also discuss that overindulgence of seafood can have an adverse effect on individuals' health. The youth wrestle with their concepts and understanding of what was consider clean and unclean. Some said that if something was made by God, then it must be okay to consume (Lev. 11:24).

Youth on this night looked at creating a healthier meal based on Leviticus 11: 46. A class handout was provided, and from the list the youth listed all of the foods they were willing to try. They agreed that food such as salmon, vegetables, fish, and fruits were good and produced better results for a healthy diet. The youth were also reminded that daily fitness or exercising was another way of maintaining health. The Bible points out in Leviticus 11, verse 46, that God handed down dietary regulations regarding how the children of Israel would practice their loyalty to God under the care of Moses.

However, the New Testament looks at the creation of animals differently in Acts 10: 9-15. Peter's vision showed him a different understanding of clean and unclean. The youth discussion led to a conversation about shopping for groceries while one is hungry; they believe that one will not exercise proper judgment during this time. Peter was following a tradition of praying just before partaking of a meal and therefore, he was within ritual practice just before his meal (See Appendix D).

A class handout was provided for each participant to give feedback on the type of food preferred. The results were close for several types: Fifty percent (50%) preferred fish, chicken, and vegetables in general. Forty-six percent (46%) chose turkey and fruits as their other choice. However, when observe individually, peaches, strawberries,

broccoli, watermelon, and cabbage had a thirty-one percent (31%) favorability rating. We ended class with prayer.

Fourth Class

Class four was held on October 27, 2010 and opened with prayer and scripture, Luke 22: 14-20. The youth discussed the various ways that their families do meals and when they were able to sit around a table as family. With mom and dad working odd hours during the day and sometime at part-time work, they were not often able to come together for this special time. The class discussed ways that families could offset this time whenever possible, although it is difficult at times. The youth understood that these verses referred to the practice of Jewish celebration of the Passover and recognized that this setting may not be an ideal way for getting together for dinner.

The class reviewed materials for the month of October and concluded that, although these might be ideal setting, they may not be practical for everyday living. One suggestion from that evening class was for youth to contact their parents by cell phone, text, e-mail, or iPad to see if possible when their time may coincide with each other for dinner. However, most of the youth felt that this was a good idea whenever possible. On this night, most of the youth said that God had placed on them the responsibilities to help their friends to practice better nutrition and develop better attitudes when it come to themselves and their weight. Students repeated over and over that some of their friends develop attitudes because of their weight difference. The class ended with prayer.

Fifth Class

Class five, held on November 3, 2010, open with prayer, and we read John 6:1-14. From the discussion that night, the class focused on the word *gluttony* and why it was considered one of the deadly sins. Some of the students felt the reasons for this: An over focus on food might cause a person to lose focus on other things that matter more. Students asked how two fish and bread constitute a complete meal. The class discussion was enlightening and drew many pointers and suggestions from the students.

The word *satisfied* caught the eye of a number of students. It was explained that their understanding of the word was that one should partake of a certain amount of food not to exceed the point of overeating or becoming gluttonous. Some of the students mentioned that fish were good for individuals because of the omega oil that comes from fish that helps to enhance one's skin, one's appearance and is generally good for one's body.

In serving fish, it was explained, Jesus was not seeking to set a tradition but may have simply wanted to feed the people after a long day and before he began imparting the teachings of the Father. The students used the list (Appendix D) to formulate what they considered a healthy meal could be. Many students preferred fish and chicken (50%), but expressed that they rather have their fish and chicken fried.

The class discussed the purpose of the Passover. It was explained that Jesus was following a tradition that the Jewish people celebrated their exits from slavery and their freedom to exist as a freed people after some 400 years under the power of other nations.

Students asked if the Jews' captivity could be compared to that of African Americans who were once slaves in America. Although the similarities are the same, the times and situations were so far apart and under different circumstance. The class ended with prayer.

Sixth Class

Class six was on November 10, 2010 and began with prayer. We read Genesis 1: 29-31. The class agreed that these verses charge us with the responsibilities of taken care of what God has provided. The students also said they believed that meat and vegetables are an essential part of proper nutrition and should be eaten regularly. Class discussions evolved to the point that students agreed that with God providing food and saying it was good to consume and that this did not mean youth should eat to the point of gluttony.

The class agreed that mankind should not abuse or waste food simply because we have dominion over them. They talked about the incident in which a professional football player abuses some dogs he once owned. Throughout class time, students felt that youth attitudes about better health and how one should take care of them would be key to the success for the Black Churches' existence and future growth. Students asked why the book of Genesis was important to God and what the book had to do with better health. They express concerns with the number of TV shows that promoted cooking and trying new dishes when youth may need to find ways to eat less.

Genesis dealt with genealogical, which covered the time from creation to the descent of Jacob and his sons into Egypt. The class discussed that Genesis is divided into two parts—the creation of the world up to the first humans, and later the events

surrounding the flood and post-flood humanity. Two-hundred and fifty years of historical-critical scholarship have established that Genesis was written over a long period of time, using oral and written traditions.² The class was more interested in the application of the texts to help them with making better choices with eating and better healthcare practice. The class ended with prayer.

Seventh Class

Class seven opened on November 17, 2010 with prayer. The class discussed Mark 6:33. What should be the proper way to exercise and maintain healthy bodies? The importance of daily exercise is another way to help ensure that youth become physically fit and promote better health care. Several of the students said that Thanksgiving was a time when most people, especially youth, have a tendency to overeating because of family and friends getting together for dinner at grandma's house. The holiday times are a most difficult time for one to maintain physical fitness because of large meals and visiting of families where a lot of eating takes place. Students said that many of the items served during the holiday season consisted included turkey, chicken, beans, ham, pie, cakes of all kind, and salad.

The points of discussion on this night consisted of how youth can participate in an exercising program and how this is important for youth to maintain proper weight (See Appendix C). Eighty-one percent (81%) of the students preferred walking as a favorite mode of exercise. The discussion led to how the Romans were one society of people who placed heavy emphasis on physical fitness because of the many games that they were a

² Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 9.

part of. Some of the students said that youth should practice bringing an apple, orange, or nuts to snack on during the day to help reduce their weight and practice good eating habits. However, forty-six percent (46 percent) preferred fruits base on the class survey (See Appendix D).

This class was the last class before Thanksgiving. The class discussed the project overall, and the youth were asked questions: What were their concerns about their health? Did they care about their future health? Will they start to practice better eating habits? Some of their attitudes were: “I don’t care. Let me eat whatever I want. I will have time to change.” Why should we be so concerns about what we eat now? The youth felt that in Luke 22: 14-20 and John 6: 1-14 that Jesus was simply practicing what the tradition was at that time. The youth believed that the “Lord Supper” would not be a recommendation for them to follow in this day.

The New Testament writing engaged another everyday matter that involved negotiation of the empire—namely food. One scholar has shown that every chapter of Luke’s Gospel contains references to food. The three synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) feature Jesus’ meals, including his last supper. Two of the seven “signs” that Jesus performs in John’s Gospel involve providing wine (John 2: 1-12) and feeding a crowd with bread and fish (John 6: 1-14). Paul and Peter have a major confrontation and falling out over eating companions (Gal. 2: 11-14). Paul rebukes the believers in Corinthians for their divisive and humiliating meals (1 Cor. 11: 17-34). James 3:15 and 1 John 3:16 urge

believers to provide for the hungry and needy. Rome's all-consuming trade that siphons off products from the provinces includes food (Rev. 18: 13-14).³

The researcher, however, offer to provide a thank-you dinner for the youths' participations. They agreed on pizza. It appeared that some attitudes remained the same and will take time to change. McDonald's, pizza, and fried chicken are culturally accepted among youth and adults, and they will have a most difficult time to surrendering. The class ended with prayer.

Eighth Class

Class eight was on December 1, 2010 and opened with prayer. The class discussed III John 1: 2. What are some proper ways youth can maintain good health? The class discussed how, if the Black church is to grow and continue to play a vital role in the lives of youth, that we should develop focus groups that will become part of our youth church activities. Focus groups, the youths said, would be a good way to encourage one another to practice better health and prepare better meals. A class handout was provided for students to choose what foods could be used to make up a good meal (Appendix D).

The process of learning to eat smart is similar to learning how to ride a bicycle; it's wobbly at first and you need some help, but then one day, you do it all by yourself and you remember how to do it for the rest of your life.⁴ The U. S. Department of Agriculture and the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services suggests dietary

³ Warren Carter, *The Roman Empire and the New Testament: An Essential Guide*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xx.

⁴ Betty Crocker's, *New Eat and Lose Weight*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 9.

changes to help ensure weight loss—eat a variety of foods, balance the food with physical activity, choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits, and grain products, choose a diet moderate in sugar, choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium. If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation and choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.⁵

The average American eats almost 38 percent of calories from fat, which is about 84 grams of fat daily or nearly the equivalent of eating one stick of butter each day. For healthy adults, only 30 percent of calories should come from fat and no more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat per day.⁶ As for cholesterol, health experts tell us to keep dietary cholesterol intake to less than 300 milligrams each day. Cholesterol is found only in animal foods—meats, fish, poultry, and dairy products. And the amount of fat that's present in these foods has no bearing on whether or not the foods contain cholesterol. It's the total amount of fat we eat, not the amount of cholesterol, that's linked to a greater risk for developing coronary heart disease and cancer.⁷

The students expressed a belief overall that youth attitudes and determination to practice good health will help reduce cost, produce stronger memberships, develop smarter individuals with knowledge and wisdom, create a healthier workforce, reduce diabetes, heart condition, and improve youth health overall. Youth should set up a plan and follow that plan daily—eating smart, energize with exercise, and set goals and make the effort to stick to it. The students felt that verse (2 of III John) made mention that in

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. 10.

⁷ Ibid. 10.

order to have good health; youth would need to practice better habits and follow a plan. The class was ended with prayer.

Program Overview

The purpose of this project was to empower youth with knowledge on obesity and what their responsibilities are concerning the care of their bodies as the temple of God. They were equipped with knowledge as it relates to proper nutrition and how to plan the proper intake of food consumption to ensure and promote a healthy lifestyle. They were given information on taking steps to develop a fitness program. There were Bible study times and sermons which engaged each youth and allowed them to participate in discussions on what it meant to enjoy a long life and a healthy body in the service of God.

The youth at Lewis Chapel were encouraging with their feedback and input into class discussions. Many of their points helped to enrich one's thoughts and understanding and to help with youth decisions to practice healthier lifestyles. Youth discuss plans to help ensure a good exercise program, types of food that may be healthier for maintaining weight, and how youth may develop better control over what they eat. The answers to some of these concerns will also help adults change their attitudes toward practicing better dieting and fitness during their lives. Create in me, God, a better attitude toward my health. Amen.

The class was provided with a pre-test/post-test questionnaire consisting of twelve The researcher used the quantitative research method in seeking response to the pre-test/post-test survey provided for the class. Students could response in three ways—

agree, not sure, and disagree. Thirty-nine students participated in the administering of the pre-test/post-test class survey for analysis.

Statement 1: “I worry about what other people think of the way you look.”

Responses to this question revealed that 26 percent agreed, 18 percent said they were not sure, and 56 percent disagreed. The high rate of participant disagreement may be an indication of low self-esteem, which is one of the challenges this research uncover in his search for the causes of obesity.

Statement 2: “I think Christian should be concern about their health and what they eat.” The response to this question was that 77 percent agreed, 18 percent said they were unsure, and less than 1 percent disagrees. The high rate of agreement was an indication of the number of youth who believes as Christian youth should be concern about health.

Statement 3: “I feel worse about myself after seeing photographs of models or watching movies with actors or actresses who look a certain way” The pre-test response indicate that a higher rate of participants, 77 percent, disagree, 13 percent agreed and 10 percent said they were not sure. The high rate of youth who disagreed was an indication that these youth feel good about how they look relative to actors and actresses.

Statement 4: “I consider youth obesity a problem within the congregation I attend.” The participant’s response was very close with this question. The pre-test indicates that 36 percent agree, 28 percent were not sure, and 36 percent disagreed with this statement. The close results may be an indication that youth may not understand or be aware if obesity is a problem within the church they attend. The researcher believes that youth attitudes will a play key role in developing youths’ overall attitudinal change

in understanding obesity within congregation. The results were identical with the participant's agreeing and disagreeing about church youth.

Statement 5: "I believe that if I lose weight all my problems will disappear." The response to this question on the pre-test revealed that 10 percent agreed, 21 percent was unsure, and 69 percent disagree. The high rate of participant's who disagree may be an indication that youth feel their problems will remain even if weight was not consider. The participants feel that weight or not, problems still may persist and youth attitudinal disposition will be key to maintain weight control.

Statement 6: "When I look in the mirror I feel unhappy with what I see." The response to this question was 7 percent agreed, 23 percent was not sure, and 69 percent disagreed. The high rate of response to this question may be an indication that the participants feel good about how they look. The researcher believes that the results may be an indication these youth will display confidence and self-esteem to practice healthier dieting and proper exercising regiment to help maintain weight. This response indicates a significant attitudinal change from "Agree" to "Disagree."

Statement 7: "I often make negative remarks about my body, such as: "I am so fat" or "No one will ever go out with me – I look so bad." The response to this question was 26% agree 12% not sure and 62% disagree. The researcher believes the participant's attitudes concerning their body are an indication the youth feel good about themselves. These results may not be an indication that youth in the community feel the same. The researcher only looks at youth at this church location (Lewis Chapel).

Question 8 states "I feel unhappy as a person because of my weight or the way I look." When confronted with this statement, 2 percent agreed, 13 percent were not sure,

and 85 percent disagree. The researcher notice that youth at Lewis Chapel displays a greater awareness of their looks and has the attitudes that show their confidence in themselves. The high degree of respondents displays a greater degree of self confidence and they are youth that excels in school. These youth are more likely to participate in dieting programs and exercising workout.

Statement 9: "I avoid looking in the mirror." The respondent's show a large different between agree and disagree. A response of 5 percent of respondents agreed, 13 percent were not sure, and 82 percent disagreed. The attitudes of the respondent's may be an indication that the youth feel good about the way they look. The results of this question may be an indication that these youth will do well with education to practice good overall health in classes at church.

Statement 10: "I believe children who are obese will most likely have obese parents themselves." The respondent's to this question appears to close and may reflect an attitudes that youth may believe difference at this point of life that obesity is a concerns. The respondent's indicated that 38 percent agreed, 22 percent said they were unsure, and 38% percent disagreed. Education may play a key role in preparing youth at church to practice good dieting and exercise programs.

Statement 11: "Children who are obese may have complication with their health when they are adult." The respondent's to this question shows that youth are aware that if they don't control their weight, that they can develop serious health problems as adults. The responses to this question were as follow: 64 percent agreed, 23 percent were not sure, and 13 percent disagreed.

Statement 12: “I think obesity is an epidemic in our schools and in our society today.” There were just two response to this question agree and not sure. The response was 79 percent agreed and 21 percent was not sure. This researcher concluded that after working with the youth at Lewis Chapel for eight weeks. It appears that the participants in this survey may not be aware of the obesity epidemic because other youth they associate with on a daily basis at church and school may not exhibit the traits of being obese.

The researcher can conclude that a qualitative method for research of this project was understood by all participants and the youth displayed a willingness to answer questions in a truthful and precise manner. The researcher desire was to affect an attitudinal change in the behavior of youth to practice proper dieting and exercise to combat youth obesity.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION

The researcher was richly blessed and richly enhanced through this experience initiated at Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. Obesity is a great concern for all of us. Our youth are now and will be a great resource in the success and ongoing existence of tomorrow's growth within the church.

Religion and Health

A few decades ago, the idea that religion may play a salient role in health was viewed with skepticism by many. Doctors and other health care professionals have been mindful of past practice, especially with religion, on the important role of religion in the life of people and how they appears to develop better attitudes of members within the body of the church toward better informed decisions concerning their overall care within future society. The religion and health relationship, however, has gained broader acceptance due to the growing number of rigorous social and epidemiologic investigations. Studies have shown that most find a positive relationship between religion and health. For instance, people who regularly attend church, pray, or read the Bible tend to have lower blood pressure than less religious people.¹ People who are religious are

¹ Krista M.C. Cline and Ferraro Kenneth, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2006).

hospitalized less often and are less likely to suffer from depression. Also, they are more likely to have healthier lifestyles, a stronger sense of well-being and life satisfaction, stronger immune systems, and longevity.² People who regularly attend church also found that they have lower rates of illness and death³

Although a large and growing body of research examines religion and health, relatively few studies have systematically examined religion and body weight. Given religion's positive effect on health, one might suspect that religion is associated with less obesity. Most religions condemn overeating and gluttony, but little research supports such a conclusion about adherents' actual behavior. Indeed, several studies show that some religious groups have higher rates of overweight and obesity.⁴

Obesity

The prevalence of obesity among youth and adults has increased dramatically in recent years. More than 50 percent of American adults are either overweight or obese and this represents a 30 percent increase within a 10-year period. Alarming, the percentages are also increasing in children and adolescents.⁵ Approximately 25 percent of children and adolescents are either obese or at-risk for becoming obese, and the trend is on the

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ J. Kevin Thompson and Linda Smolak, *Body Image, Eating Disorders, and Obesity in Youth: Assessment, Prevention, and Treatment*, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 8.

rise. Furthermore, obesity is a greater problem among Blacks and Hispanics than among Asian American and White children.⁶

The available data suggests that a large number of individuals between the ages of 6 and 17 are unhappy with their weight. Many of these individuals report that they are dissatisfied with their appearance, current diet, or weight level. A small percentage actually has an eating disorder, but a substantial proportion of youth may exhibit enough signs to be labeled “at-risk” or possess a “partial syndrome.”⁷ In addition, recent actuarial statistics compiled by the Centers for Disease Control indicate that an alarming and increasing number of children and adolescents met criteria for having a significant problem with excess weight.⁸

The news does not stop there, more recent and also disturbing trends reflect the problems and pressures our youth feel from growing up in a world increasingly focused on the importance of attractiveness, is the use of surgical procedures to alter their appearance.⁹

An analysis of plastic surgery data indicates that many adolescents have decided to opt for a relatively radical method of modifying appearance dissatisfaction. A wealth of statistical data reflective of the 134 percent, increase from 1994 to 1998 the use of cosmetic procedures by persons under the age of 18.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Where do we go from here? How do we overcome this epidemic facing our youth and tomorrow's black church? How do church leaders build self-esteem, values, and motivation in our youth and propel them as the leader for tomorrow church? These are but a few questions that the researcher attempted to address, but will continue to explore other areas in the search for answers to promote healthier congregations to do the works of Jesus in the church.

A recent meta-analysis of weight level and self-esteem found that lower self-esteem was associated with a heavier weight. In addition, psychosocial stressors in childhood and adolescence are predictive of weight gain.¹¹ In the case of eating and weight-related disturbances, evidence strongly suggests that such a fear is valid. Children over the age of 6 had a 50% higher risk of adult obesity. In addition, having an obese parent significantly increases the chance that an obese child will become an obese adult, 79 % of obese 10 to 14 year olds with at least one obese parent were at risk to become an obese adult.¹²

¹¹ Ibid. 10.

¹² Ibid. 11.

Theological Growth

Probably the main reason for hating fat is that it is out of fashion. An obese person is more outré than someone whose clothes are ten years out of date; a fat man in bell-bottomed knit slacks is less fashionable than a slim man in a narrow tie. About the only thing as out of style as being fat is being deformed or crippled.¹³

This *fin de siècle* attitude in which size was equated with accomplishment is an echo of the biblical outlook. Most of the Old Testament uses of the word “fat” are sacrificial references in which the blood and the fat are considered to be the centers of the vital force of a sacrificial animal and, therefore, the parts most appropriately offered to God. With this thought process lies a primitive belief that the gods are dependent on men for their nourishment when they sojourn on earth. Consequently, when fatness is given to men it is thought to be an extraordinary sign of divine favor.¹⁴

There are occasions in which the Bible addresses obesity: Eglon, the king of Moab, in Judges 3: 12-30. Otherwise fatness is a sign of God’s good will (e.g., it is said of the righteous in the Book of Common Prayer translation of Psalm 92:13: “They also shall bring forth more fruit in their age and shall be fat and well-liking”). The Deuternomic theory of history does take over on occasion and fatness becomes a cause of

¹³ Edwards, *How It All Began*, xx.

¹⁴ Ibid.

pride so that men forget their dependence upon God, but most of the time fatness is regarded as a badge of divine approval.¹⁵

However, it might have been for most of human history and so might it be today for the majority of men, that the very prosperous countries such as West Germany and the United States that excess weight is no longer an esteemed badge of affluence and has come to be a badge of shame instead of being *prima facie* evidence of God's good will.¹⁶

According to the third United Nations Conference of Trade and Development, 40% or three-fourths of the world's production is consumed by six per cent of the population¹⁷. Just so happens that this six percent lives in the United States.¹⁸ The time will come that one-tenth of the people on earth will receive almost three-quarters of the income. The affluent nations are the technologically advanced nations. Thus, those who have the most money and who can afford more and better food are the very ones who expend the least amount of energy in the performance of their work.¹⁹ Obesity has joined the ranks of the problems that have been created by our technology.

While many youth consume more calories than they burn, youth have an intake based on a level of output that is no longer demanded, there are also psychological reasons why many of youth overeat. Oral gratification is part of the nourishment of the child inside each of us and we have developed neurotic eating patterns as a way of coping

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

with anxiety. Some psychologists go so far as to say that fat is a symbolic buffer zone between people who do not relate very well in the world; it serves as a barrier to keep at a distance to “all those other people” of whom one is so frightened.²⁰

The expected outcome with the youth at church was to improve the overall attitudes about developing better habits and improvements toward healthier lifestyles, control weight lost, increase more exercising, and making better choices concerning eating behavior. The goal toward religion and health will be better understood when our churches take the body, soul, and minds of its members seriously, starting with the youth of the church. This project appears to suggest that our youth mirror the health and attitudes of their parents, adults, and church congregation. Why then should we as a society not develop proactive attitudes for the security and well being for tomorrow church future?

As a result of this research, some recommendation for churches to assist youth are to aid them in: the practice of better food intake, the increase of physical fitness programs, the development knowledge on prepared meals, the participation in education on better health care, shopping for healthier food, and learning how to develop garden skills and plant vegetables.

²⁰ Ibid.

APPENDIX A
PERMISSION SLIP

PERMISSION SLIP

I give permission for my child _____ to participate in classes on nutrition, healthy choices at restaurants, prayer, and scriptures references to health and the purpose of good health. The classes will be part of Bible study each Wednesday night for eight (8) weeks at Lewis Chapel Missionary Baptist Church. The purpose of these classes is to develop awareness, so that our youth can make better informed choices that will have a positively impact on their health now and in the future.

If you have any questions concerning the survey please don't hesitate to contact me at clifmarshall@hotmail.com or 910-261-5467.

Thanks in advance for your help and support.

God Bless

Rev. Clifton Marshall

(Parent/Guardian signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX B

SERMON REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION HANDOUT

Discussed during Bible Study classes on October 6, 2010

Text: Daniel 1: 12 – 15 “Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of his children that eat of the portion of the king’s meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days. And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king’s meat.”

1. Please discuss some reasons why dieting can be difficult?
2. What are some approaches that lead to better dieting?
3. How do you feel about yourself?
4. How does youth develop healthy concept about themselves?
5. How important is exercise to you?

APPENDIX C
PHYSICAL ACTIVITES

Discussed during Bible Study classes On October 13, 2010

Text: Proverb 23: 20 – 21 “Be not among winebibbers; among riotous eater of flesh. For the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.”

List: Physical Activities

Aerobics	Baseball	Basketball
Bowling	Cycling	Dancing
Football	Gardening	Gymnastics
Handball	Hiking	Hockey
Horseback riding	Jogging	Mowing lawn
Racquetball	Rowing	Running
Swimming	Table tennis	Walking

APPENDIX D
BEST OF FOOD

Discussed during Bible Study classes On October 20, 2010

Text: John 6:1-14 “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.
But what are they among so many people.”

List: Best of Food

Whole wheat	Bagel	Rice cake
Vegetables	Fruits	Blueberries
Blackberries	Grapes	Oranges
Peach	Pear	Pineapple
Plum	Strawberries	Watermelon
Turkey	Chicken	Bologna
Fish	Salmon	Oysters
Green beans	Broccoli	Cabbage

APPENDIX E
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discussed during Bible Study classes On October 27, 2010

Text: Luke 22: 14 - 20

1. Do you think Jesus practiced what a regular meal should be?
2. Would the Passover meal be a recommendation for Church membership?
3. What is a proper prepared dinner?
4. Which is better for youth chicken or fish dinners?
5. Does God expect youth to practice healthier attitudes toward one's body?

APPENDIX F

HOW TO PREPARE DINNER

Discussed during Bible Study classes November 3, 10, 17, 2010

Text: 1 Cor. 11: 17 – 34 and 1 John 3: 16

Prepared dinner:

Orange- and Ginger-Glazed Chicken

Prep: 5 min; Cook: 20 min

4 servings

Spreadable fruits contain no added refined sugar, but

Instead rely on the sugar within various fruits for sweetness.

4 skinless boneless chicken breast halves

(1 pound)

1/3 cup orange marmalade spreadable fruit

1 teaspoon finely chopped gingerroot or 1/2

Teaspoon ground ginger

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

Spray 10- inch skillet with nonstick cooking spray;

heat over medium-high heat. Cook chicken in skillet

about 5 minutes or until bottoms are brown;

turn chicken. Stir in remaining ingredients; reduce

heat to low.

Cover and simmer 10 to 15 minutes, stirring sauce

occasionally, until sauce is thickened and juice of

chicken is no longer pink when centers of thickest

pieces are cut. Cut chicken into thin slices. Spoon

sauce over chicken.

APPENDIX G

PRE-TEST/POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I worry about what other people think of the way I look.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
2. I think Christians should be concern about their health and what they eat.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
3. I feel worse about myself after seeing photographs of models or watching movies with actors or actresses who look a certain way.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
4. I consider youth obesity a problem within the congregation I attend.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
5. I believe that if I lose weight all my problems will disappear.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
6. When I look in the mirror, I usually feel unhappy with what I see.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
7. I often make negative remarks about my body, such as: "I am so fat," or "No one will ever go out with me – I look so bad".
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
8. I feel unhappy as a person because of my weight or the way I look.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
9. I avoid looking in the mirror because of what I see.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
10. I believe children who are obese will most likely have obese parents themselves.
 - a. Agree
 - b. Not sure
 - c. Disagree

11. Children who are obese can expect to have complication with their health when they are adults.
- a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree
12. I think obesity is an epidemic in our schools and in our society today.
- a. Agree
 - b. Not Sure
 - c. Disagree

APPENDIX H

PRE-TEST

TELL US ALL YOU HAVE EATEN TODAY

BREAKFAST:

LUNCH:

DINNER; (What did you have yesterday?)

WHAT DID YOU DRINK TODAY?

APPENDIX I

POST-TEST

LIST ALL YOU HAVE EATEN TODAY

BREAKFAST:

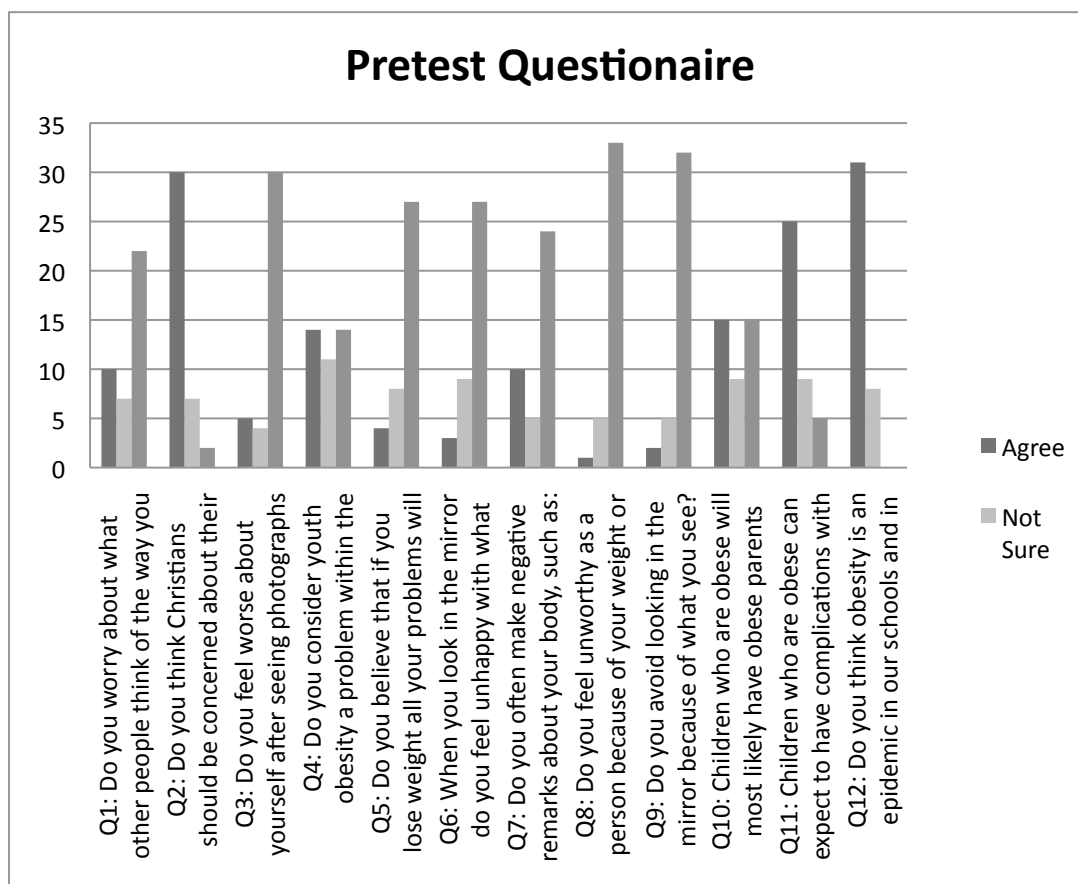
LUNCH:

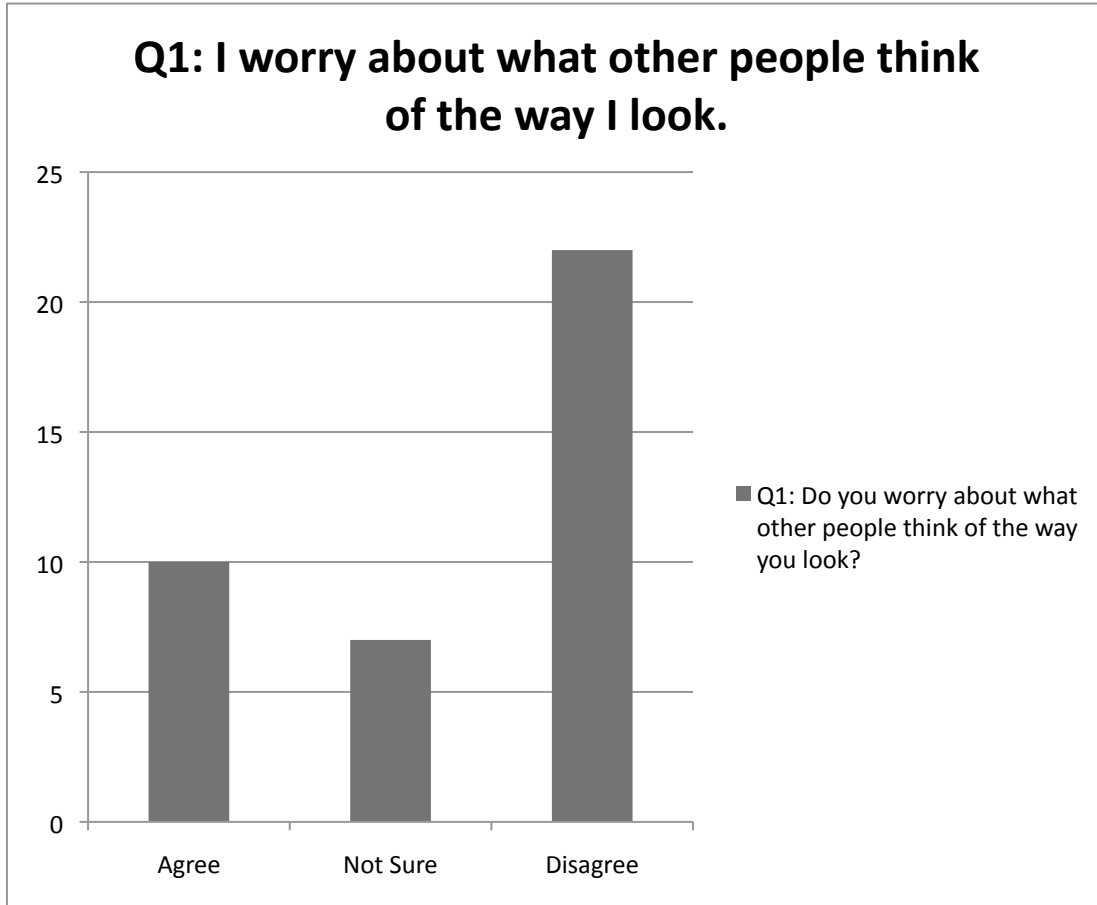
DINNER: (WHAT DID YOU HAVE YESTERDAY?):

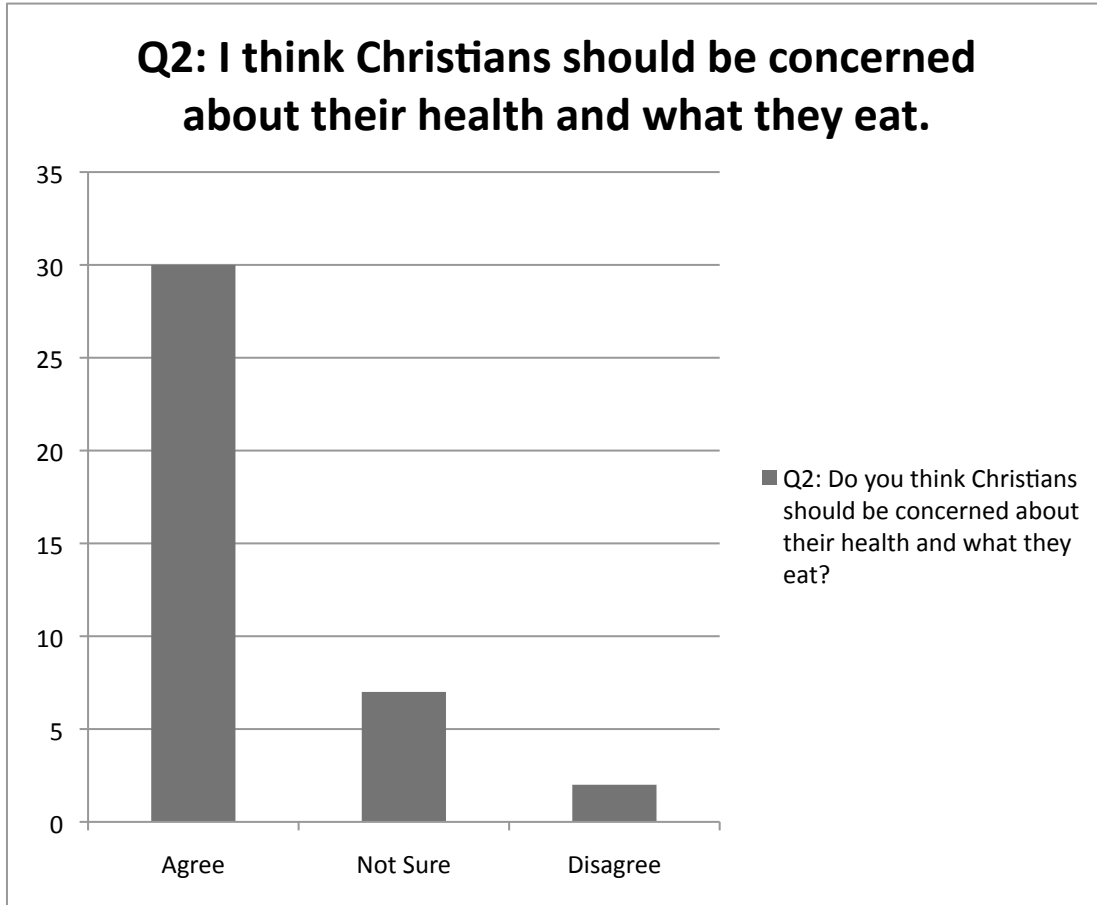
WHAT DID YOU DRINK TODAY?

APPENDIX J

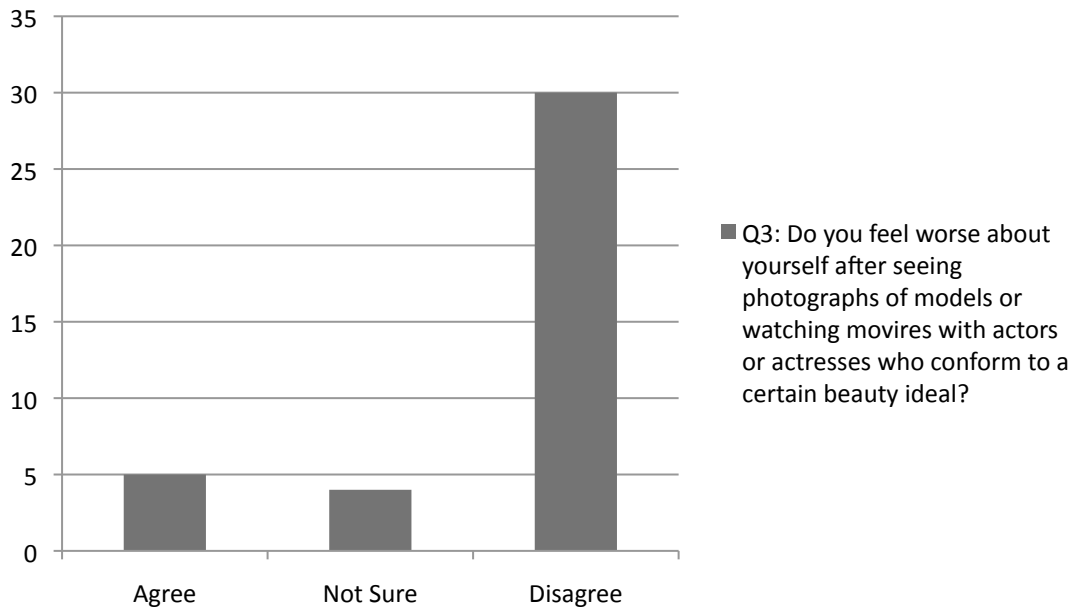
BAR GRAPHS

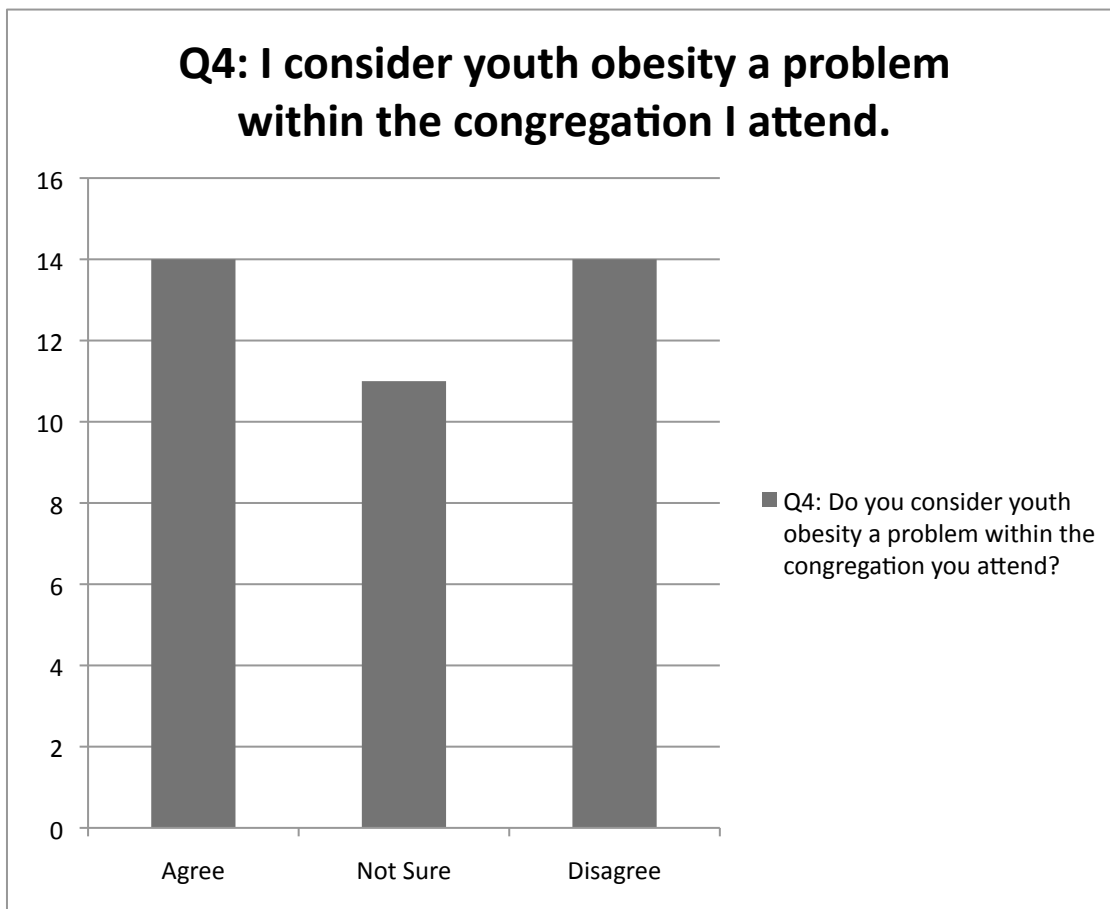


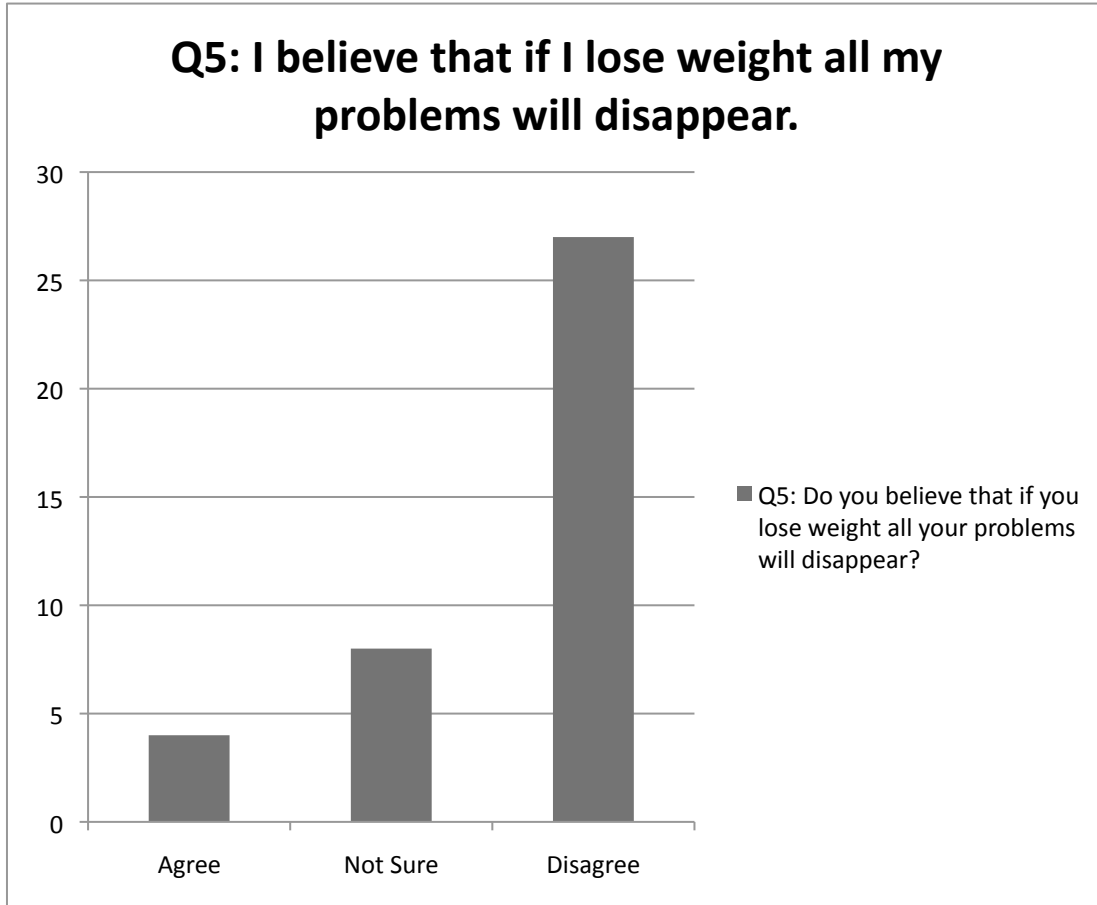


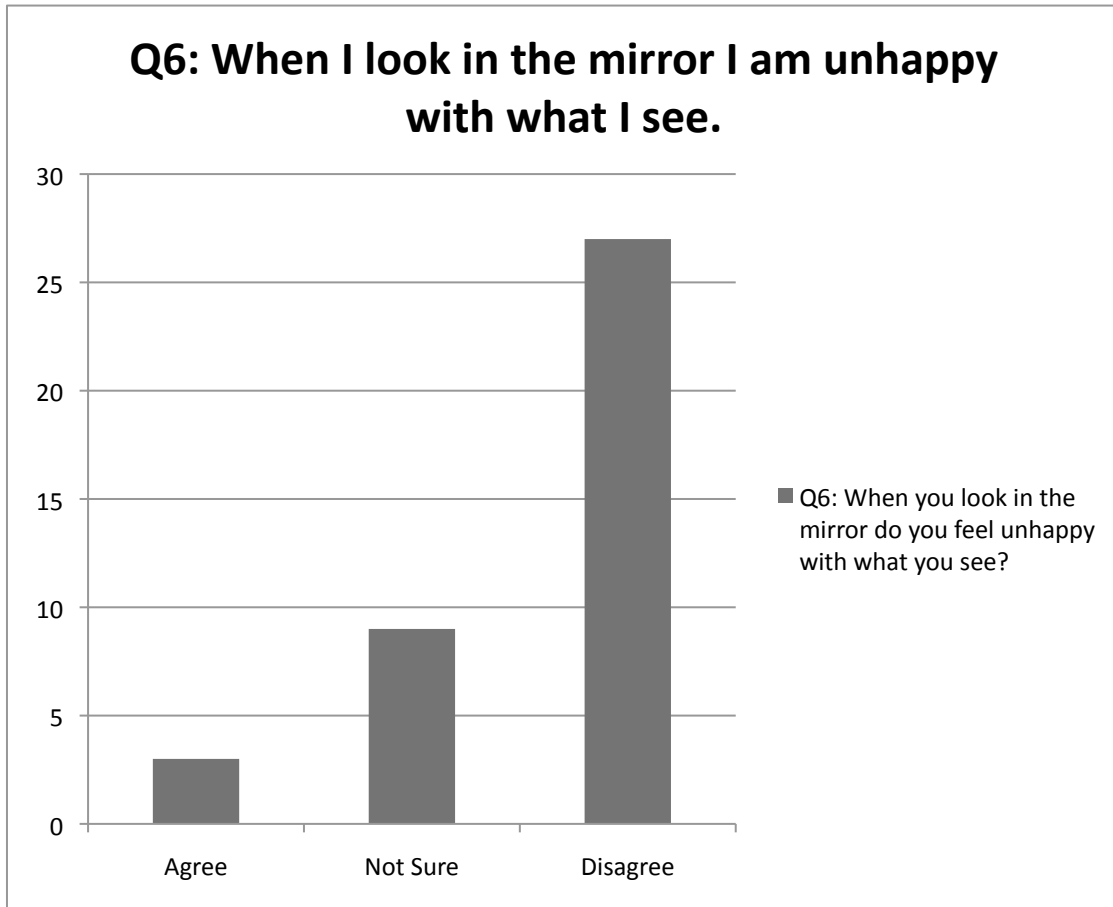


**Q3: I feel worse about myself after seeing
photographs of models or watching movies
with actors or actresses who conform to a
certain beauty ideal.**

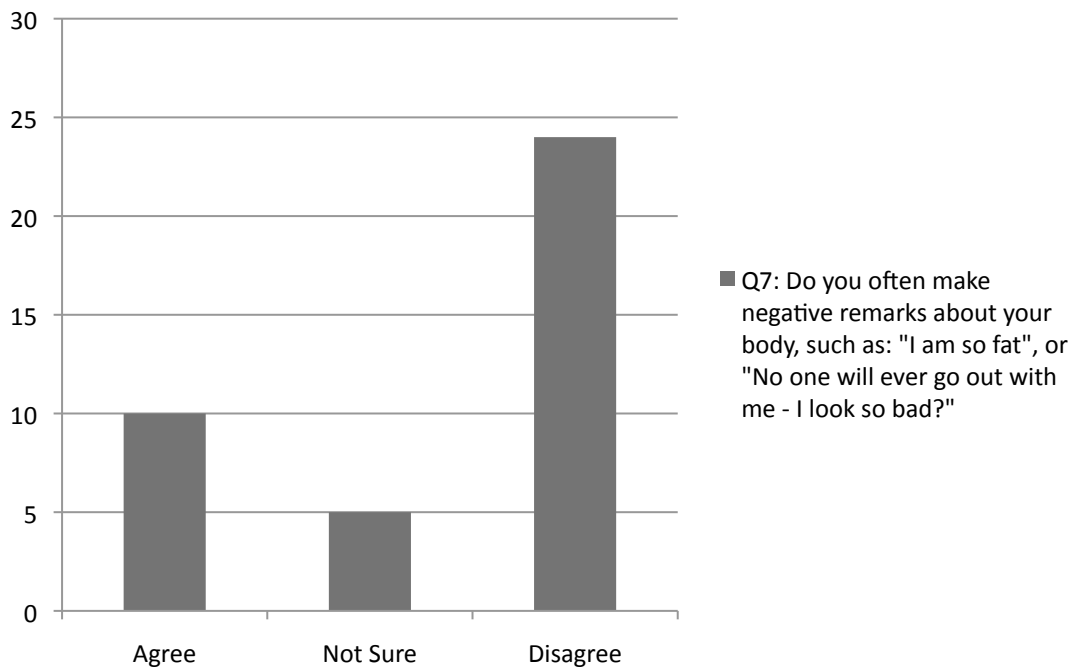


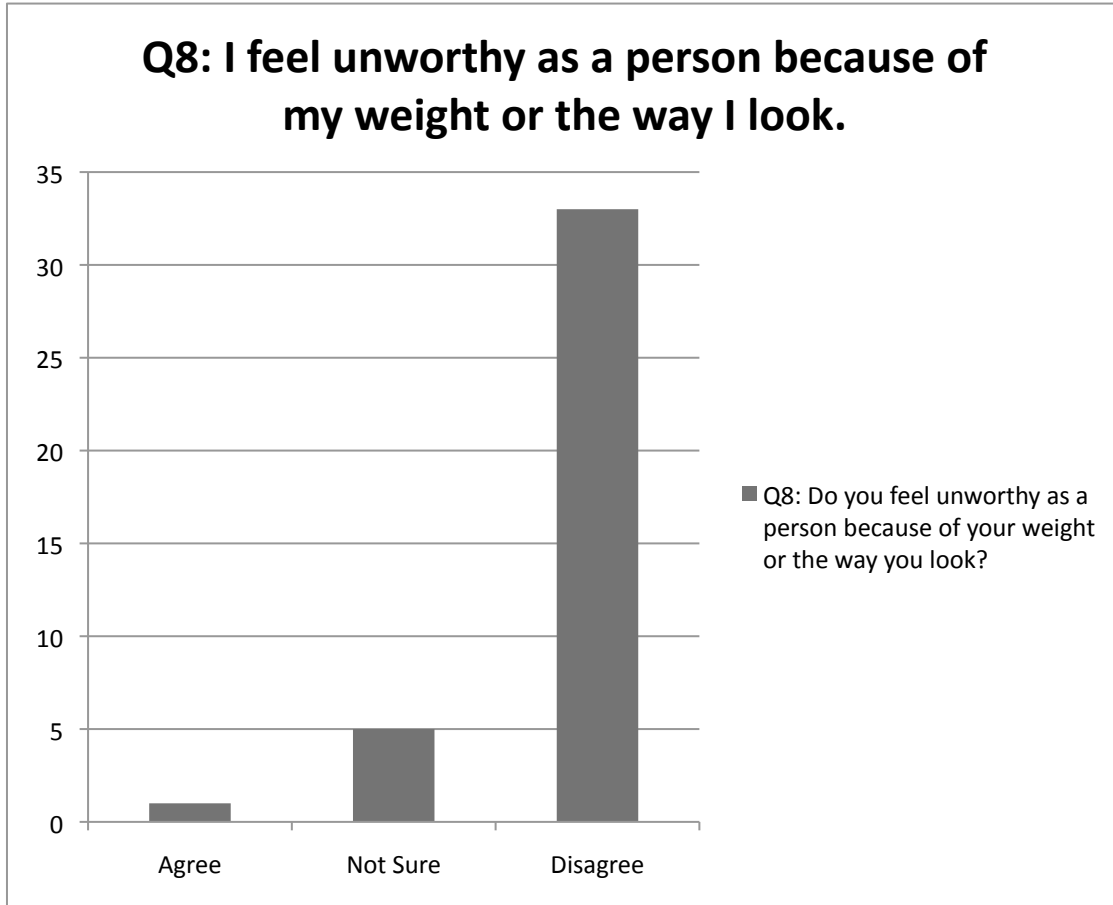


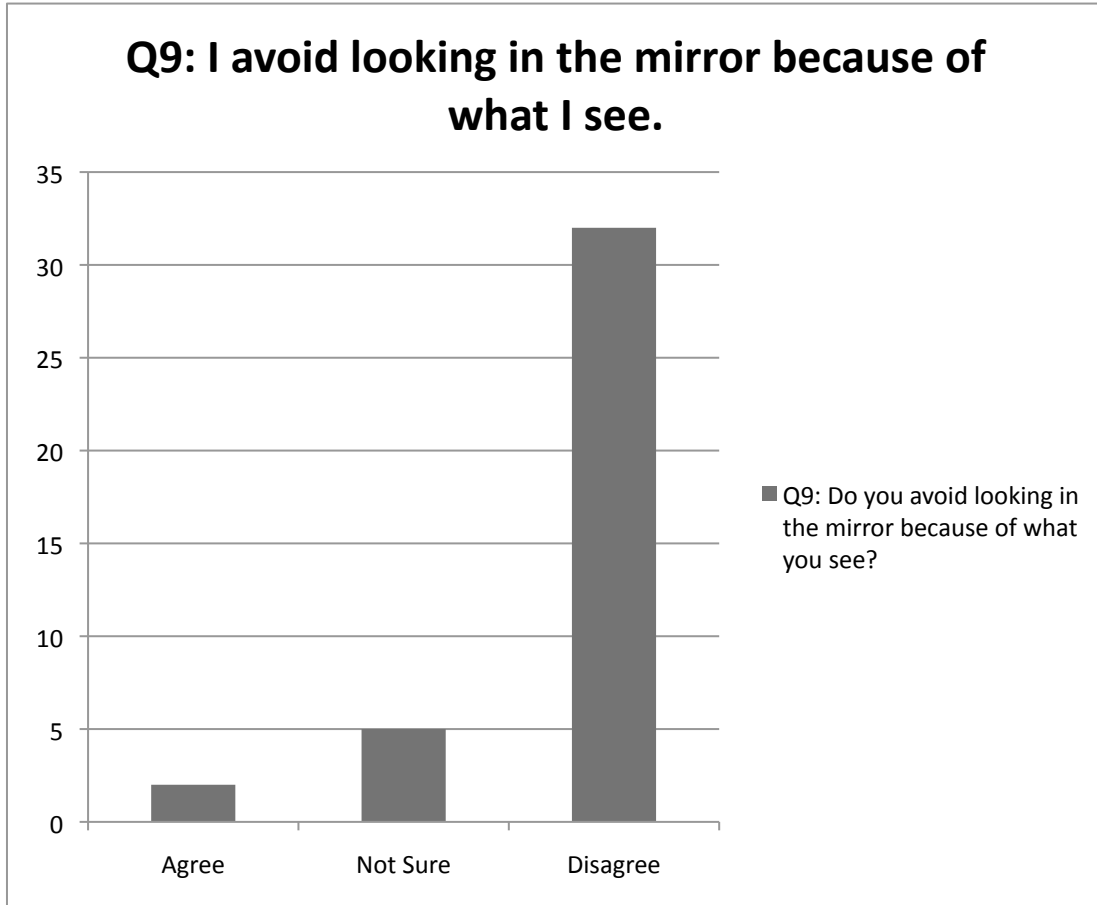


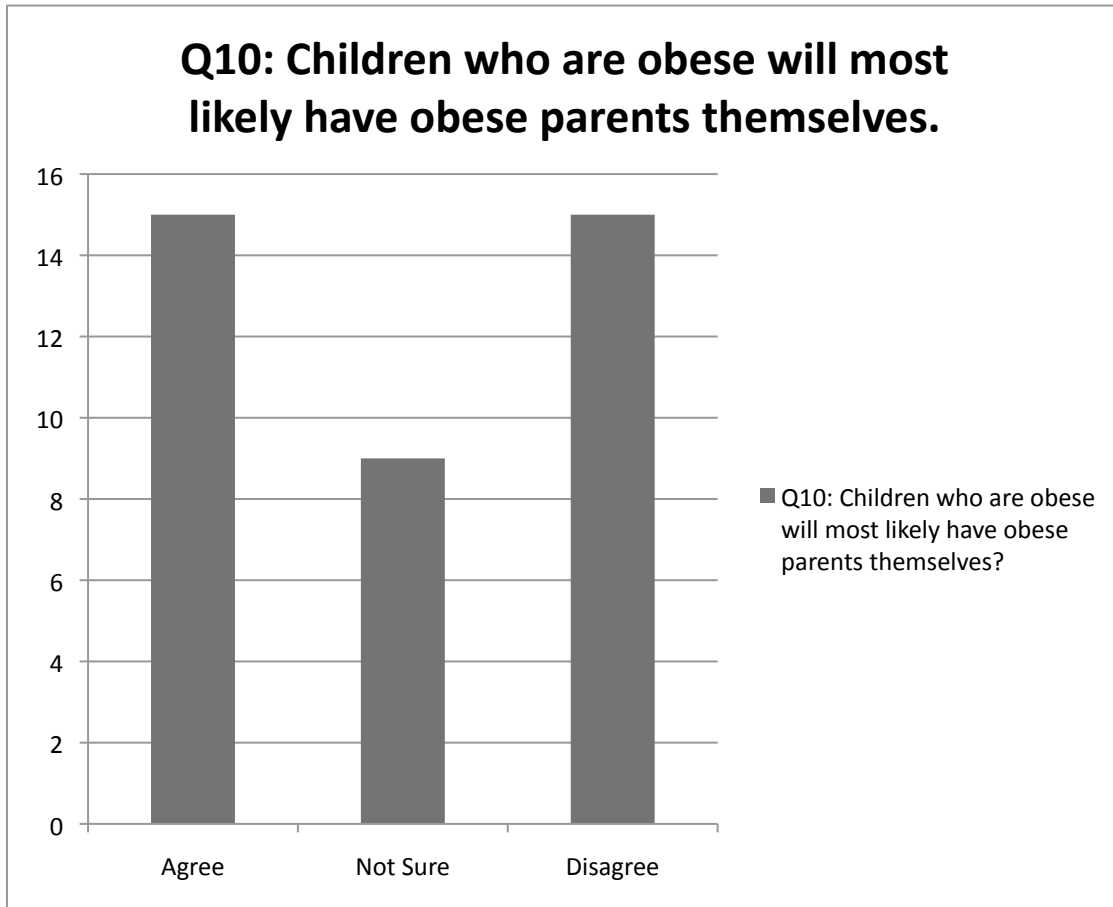


Q7: I often make negative remarks about my body, such as: "I am so fat", or "No one will ever go out with me - I look so bad."

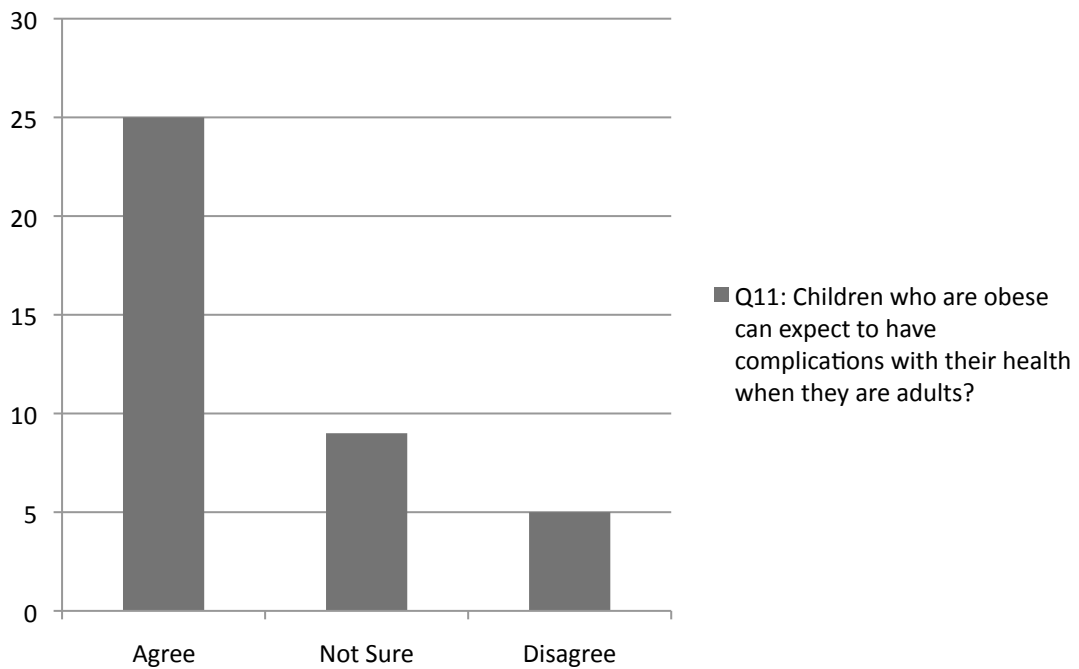


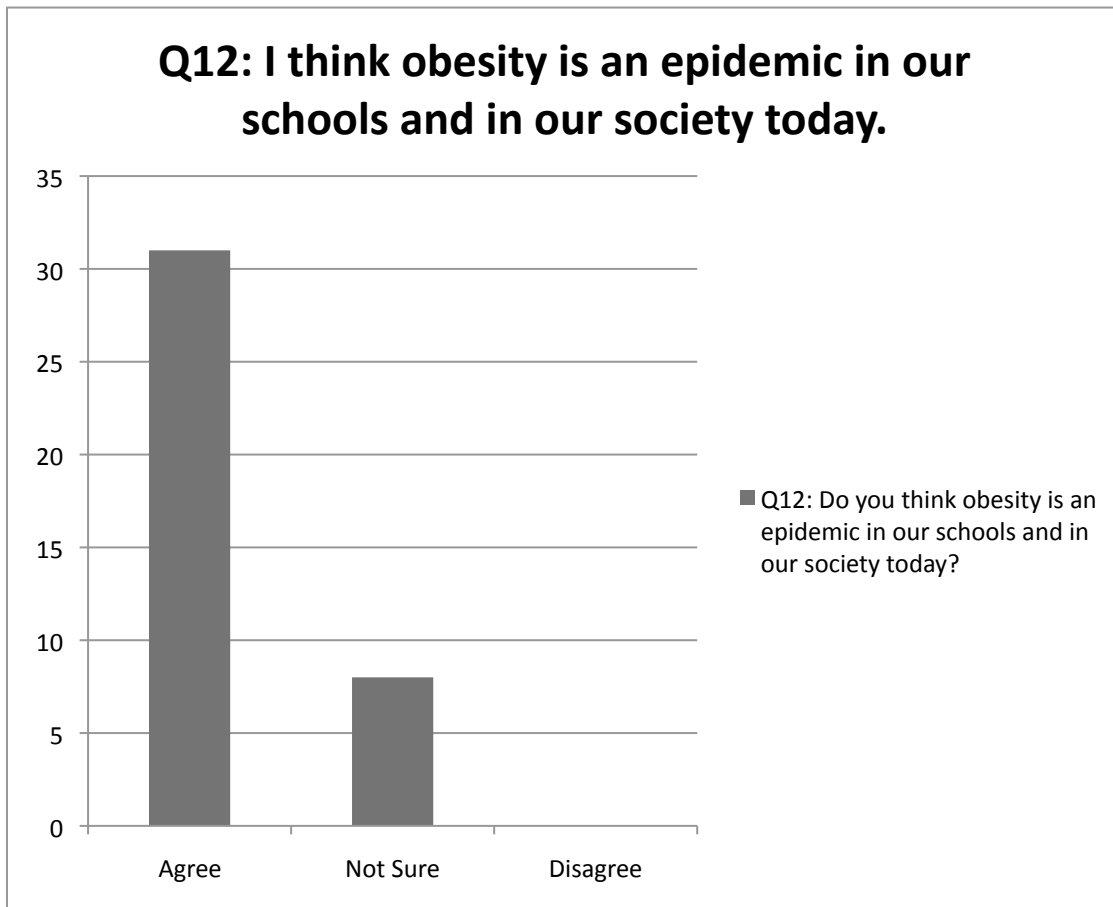


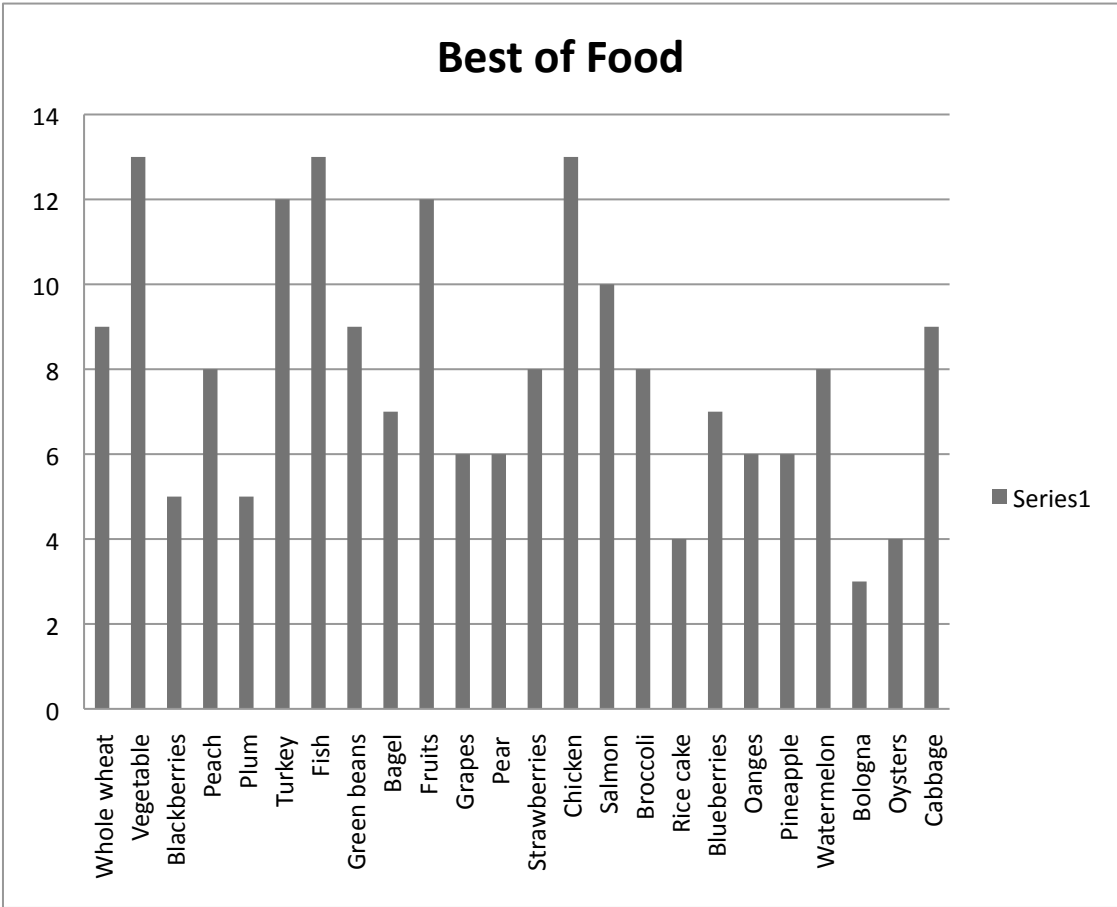


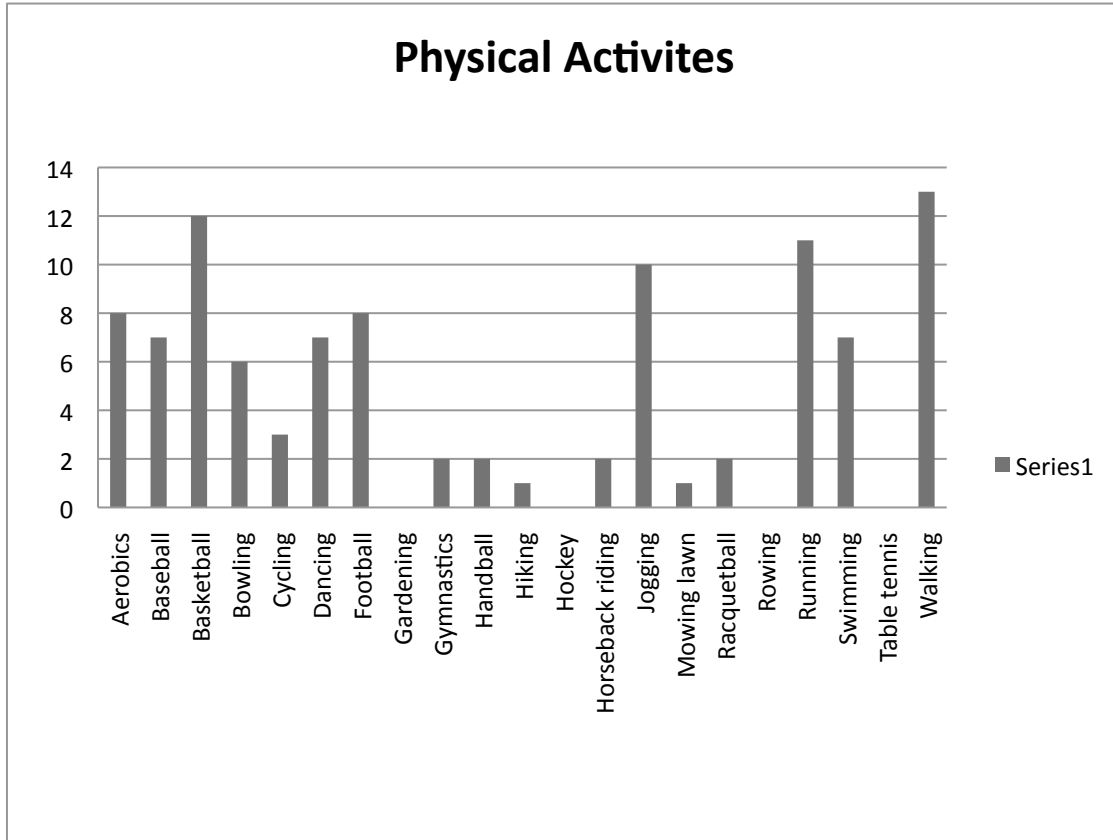


Q11: Children who are obese can expect to have complications with their health when they become adults.









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